



ASIA • MIDDLE EAST • AFRICA • SOUTH AMERICA

The Marsh Henstridge Somerset BA8 0TF UK

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

16H info@oasisoverland.co.uk • 17H www.oasisoverland.co.uk

Ottoman Odyssey

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

18 Days Istanbul to Damascus or V.V.

Istanbul and Damascus are both interesting and exciting cities to visit. As we spend only a morning or an evening in Istanbul as part of the trip we recommend staying for a couple of days before or after your trip departs or arrives. We are in Damascus for 2 days as part of the trip so it is fine to arrive the day before the trip departs or depart Damascus the day after the trip ends, depending on how much free time you would like in this city. 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.

FLIGHTS

To fly from London into either Istanbul or Damascus and return from the other city costs from around GB£300 to GB£380, including airport tax. The cost may be more around Easter and in July/August. It's best to book early in these months. Lufthansa, BMI and Austrian Airlines usually have the best prices. British Airways also have good prices if you are under 26 or have a student card. Please call us if you need any advice regarding where to book flights.

STARTING IN ISTANBUL

You can easily change money at the airport banks on arrival. A taxi to centre of town costs around GB£20. The taxis all have meters so make sure the driver switches his meter on. If the taxi driver says his meter is not working get out of the taxi and jump in the one behind. The taxis queue up immediately outside the airport. The Sultanahmet area is the most interesting and central place to stay. This area is full of cheap restaurants plus the Aya Sofya and Blue Mosque and the Topkapi Palace. We recommend the **Sultan Hostel** bookings@sultanhostel.com at 21 Akbiyik Caddesi in Sultanahmet or just 20 meters away the **Orient Youth Hostel** orienthostel@superonline.com, in the same street. These are both friendly but basic places to stay. Dorm rooms cost about GB£6 a night or single rooms for £13, double/twin room for GB£17 and the Sultan also has triples for £24 or Quadruple for £32. All prices include breakfast. At the Sultan most rooms have showers and it also has a free safety deposit box. If you would like a hotel, there are two on the same street that have been recommended by past clients of ours. The **Hotel Gul Sultan** www.gulsultanhotel.com has single rooms from £28, double/twin £36, triple £46, breakfast included. The **Hotel Alaturka** www.hotelalaturka.com has single rooms for £30, doubles £40, triples £50, breakfast included. They also have an airport pick-up service which costs approximately £17.

While the crew and truck stay on the outskirts of the city, we recommend that you stay in town if you arrive a day or two early to see some of the main sites in Istanbul. An informal pre-departure meeting will be held at either the Orient or Sultan hostels, the evening before the trip departs so you can meet the rest of the group plus your Oasis crew and have a bite to eat.

Notices informing you of the time and location of the pre-departure meeting, as well as our crew's contact details, will be placed in the reception of both the Orient and Sultan Hostels by your crew about 4 days before the trip starts.

The Istanbul-Damascus trip officially starts at 8am on Day One of the trip from outside the Orient & Sultan hostels. (We will arrange transport the morning the trip departs to take you out to the Oasis truck).

After a half-day drive through olive groves and rural settlements, we spend the first night at Gallipoli.

STARTING IN DAMASCUS

You can change money in the airport banks using US Dollars or Euros. The departure Hotel we use in Damascus is the Ghazal Hotel at Souq Shareya, Damascus. Tel 011 2313736. email – ghazal_hotel@hotmail.com. It is a small friendly family run hotel with only 24 beds and costs \$12 (£7) per person for a double room with shower and breakfast, \$14 (£8) for a single room with shower and breakfast, or \$9 (£5) per person sharing a triple or quad. These are excellent rates and Oasis does not take a commission or a booking fee for reserving the rooms on your behalf. You pay the hotel direct on arrival in Syrian Ponds. If you let us know your flight arrival details **at least two weeks before the trip begins**, we can organise an airport transfer to the Hotel. This costs \$20 (£13) and is paid to the hotel on arrival. Our expedition vehicle will be staying at New Kaboun Camping, Autostrad Damascus – Homs, Damascus. Tel. 011 452 6235. Our Tour Leader will come and meet you at the Ghazal Hotel at 6 pm the day before the trip starts. There will also be a notice in the Ghazal Hotel reception with your Tour Leaders contact details.

The Ghazal Hotel is situated in the 'old city' part of Damascus. This is a magical, meandering place to explore the markets, the thriving Christian quarter and the old churches and mosques. Within the immediate vicinity of the Ghazal Hotel, there are many small restaurants, kebab houses, juice bars, felafel shops etc. where you can eat for as little as US .50 cents. There are also slightly more upmarket restaurants dotted around near the souk, and these cost around 5 - 10USD for a meal.

The Damascus to Istanbul trip officially starts at 6pm on the night before Day One of the trip from the Ghazal Hotel. This enables you time to do the Lebanon excursion if you wish on Day One.

LOCAL PAYMENT

Local Payment is part of your overall tour investment and is the easiest and most economical way for Oasis Overland to get hard currency to Syria 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 English Pounds Sterling cash, Euros cash or US Dollars cash only. Scottish Pounds are not accepted.**

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

PASSPORT & VISA REQUIREMENTS

Please bring 3 photocopies of your passport details page and one passport photo to give to your tour leader. You'll need at least 3 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. **Passports with an Israeli stamp or any indication of travel to Israel must be replaced.**

Visas are needed for all the countries we visit on this trip at a total cost shown below. Please ensure that you bring sufficient US Dollars to pay for these as follows:

Turkey - Visas are issued upon arrival in Turkey at a cost of £10 for British and US\$20 for Australians. New Zealand and South African passport holders do not pay for their visas.

Syria - All nationalities need a visa which you must obtain before travel. If you are planning on taking the optional day trip to Lebanon, you will need a multiple entry visa. The cost for UK passport holders is currently £37 single entry, £57 multiple entry. Australian & New Zealand passport holders £20 single and £30 multiple entry. Payment has to be by cash. The address for the Syrian Arab Republic Embassy is 8 Belgrave Square, London. SW1X 8PH. Tel: 09065 508935. Opening hours Mon-Fr 1000-1200. Website – www.syrianembassy.co.uk click on 'consular section' and then 'visa'. You can download the visa form from their website.

To apply you will need 2 application forms, 2 passport size photos, your passport, and allow 4 to 7 days for processing. To help you complete the application forms; your point of entry into Syria (if you are starting the trip in Istanbul) is the Bab al-Hawa border from Antakya in Turkey. Your point of exit will be from Damascus Airport (this is in reverse if starting the trip in Damascus). Your date of entry will be 6 days before your trip ends in Damascus. Duration of stay in Syria is 6 days plus any time you have before your flight departs or after your flight arrives in Damascus. If you are not sure put 10 days. Our address in Damascus is Kaboun Camping, Autostrad Damascus – Homs, Damascus. Tel. 011 512 6235. You may also be asked for a short letter from your employer or college stating who you are. Your visa will be valid for 3 months from Date of Issue so don't apply for it more than three months before you are due to enter Syria. **Make sure you have NO Israel stamps in your passport. Syria's name for Israel is 'Occupied Palestine.'**

Lebanon – The visa for Lebanon is included in the price of the optional excursion (US\$75). You will need to bring a photocopy of the personal details page of your passport and your tour leader will apply for the visa en-route. However we are not currently recommending the day trip as British Foreign Office is advising against all non-essential travel to Lebanon.

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. In Africa - all White Water Rafting that is available is 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 & 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 & 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 includes 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, New Zealand, South 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 and flights, subject to the standard policy terms and conditions.

NOTE: If you are interested in extra insurance cover for your **photographic equipment** – please contact Oasis and 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. Please be aware that most home and contents insurance policies may also include cover for photographic and electrical equipment whilst abroad.

OASIS CREW & ADVENTURE TRAVEL

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, border crossings and accommodation, finding the best deals, pre-booking some excursions and guides, helping with shopping and cooking, keeping up with the party animals and making sure everything runs as smoothly as possible.

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 of the countries through which we travel, they are not guides as such. The diversity and extent of the history and cultures in this region is 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 at each site

LIFE ON THE ROAD & ACCOMMODATION

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. Occasionally there will be a longer driving day, but this is usually followed by several days stopped in one location. In the evening we will stop in either a campsite or hostel or even a bush or desert camp on occasion where you and your tent partner will put up your tent, and then give a hand with getting out the tables and stools or maybe the cook awning and water containers. We usually cook in groups of three on a rota system. You can expect to cook about twice on the trip. At breakfast everyone helps themselves. Usually breakfasts are quite easy and simple, eggs, toast, coffee, tea and sometimes cereals when available. Occasionally we have a fried breakfast. 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 and between us all we usually come up with some great meals. Our crew will always do their best to cater for Vegetarians or Vegans when the group are cooking but it must be remembered that the variety of dishes available may not be the same as available to meat eaters.

Accommodation - We camp with 2 person tents in campsites and the desert and stay in hotel/pensions in shared rooms. In the summer months we will camp around 70% of the time and about 30% in simple hotels/pensions, although we camp less during the winter. Most places have showers and if they are hot, that's a bonus! It must be remembered that the hotel/hostel/pension accommodation we use is an integral part of the countries through which we travel and can suffer from common problems such as, electrical failure, plumbing faults and other technical difficulties.

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. Most nights on the trip you will be able to shower.

The variety of accommodation is a totally unique experience, including tents, hotels, tree houses and simple village pensions. .

FOOD & DRINK

We usually supply a minimum of 50% of the meals, mainly breakfast and dinner. If we have a long days drive we will prepare three meals as a group, however, when staying in a hotel/pension in a town or city eg. Cappadocia, we will usually just provide breakfast as it is easy, cheap and fun to eat out and difficult to prepare meals from the truck. When camping we prepare meals in teams on a rota system and you can expect to cook about two days on the trip, depending on the group size. The rest of the meals are left free for you to discover the local cuisine. Your tour leader will always attempt to point you in the right direction – and often join you at the best places anyway! Where necessary we purify our drinking water. Tap water is generally, but not always, safe to drink but bottled water is widely available for between 30p – £1 per 1.5ltr. Whenever we cook there is a plentiful supply of coffee and tea bubbling away and the kettle is well boiled on our gas cooker. Boiled water is always safe to drink. In all the countries we travel through cheap local beer, wine and spirits are available or you can buy western brands duty free at the airport when you arrive. Most market & roadside stalls serve cheap healthy food from rotisserie chicken & lamb, shwarma, falafel, kebabs, hummus to more exotic baba ghanouj (mashed aubergine). All food usually comes with Arabic bread & salad. Very sweet desserts, pastries & strong Turkish coffee/tea are easily found.

OASIS OVERLAND VEHICLES & SECURITY ONBOARD

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.

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

- Comfortable coach seats with removable seat bases for easy access to your baggage throughout the day
- 12 Volt recharging system for camera /video batteries
- Internal & external lighting system
- Onboard stereo & adaptor for iPod, MP3 or CD walkmans
- Inter cab buzzer for communication with the crew
- Extra storage space for excess baggage and souvenirs
- Easy to reach overhead racking for day bags and cameras
- Lockable safe for storage of money and valuables
- Professionally compiled expedition medical kit
- Cooler boxes for food and drinks
- On board library
- Camp stools
- Roomy 2 person tents
- Large water carrying capacity
- Large storage facilities for dried, tinned & fresh food
- Extensive cooking equipment & facilities

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

Contact from home - The most reliable way to receive messages from friends and family is via email, which is quite common place now in main areas that we visit – but the efficiency or speed in connection is never a guarantee!! You will usually be able to email every couple of days.

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.

Time - All countries are about 2 hours ahead of UK. Time is something that Middle Eastern people 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 - Arabic and Turkish are the official languages in the countries we pass through. English is widely spoken as a second language in larger towns. However, learning some basic phrases will be rewarded when meeting local people.

WHAT TO WEAR & WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Women Travellers - People in the regions we pass through are generally conservative, especially about matters concerning sex and women. Muslim countries simply are not the place to make a feminist statement. Attitudes range from fairly liberal on the Mediterranean Coast, to very conservative in some of the small towns and areas of Syria, although Damascus is quite cosmopolitan. 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. Generally on beaches you can wear what you like.

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 - There are no compulsory jabs needed although it is advisable to be immunized against; Tetanus; Polio; Typhoid, Meningitis and Hepatitis A. Consult your doctor or a medical clinic.

Good clinics for malaria info and vaccinations are:

In London: Nomad Travellers Store and Medical Centre – Tel 0208 889 7014 (Turnpike Lane Tube) 3-4 Wellington Terrace, Turnpike Lane. They also sell medical kits and give a 10% discount on equipment and jabs to Oasis Overland clients and have stores in Bristol and Southampton as well. Trailfinders Travel Clinic - Tel 0207 938 3999 (High St Kensington Tube) 194 Kensington High St, London.

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

Clinics do not always give detailed medical advice over the phone. It is best to phone for their opening hours and make an appointment.

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 - We advise you bring along your own small medical kit to include; antiseptic ointment; antihistamine cream; nurofen or equivalent pain-killer; eye drops/bath; anti diarrhoea treatment; sun block; after sun/moisturiser; rehydration sachets; plasters; suitable antibiotics as recommended by your doctor for infected cuts and to treat severe dysentery.

Malaria - The areas through which we travel are considered to be malaria free.

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

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 our experience of running trips and supporting worthwhile organisations we have developed our own practical and manageable environmental policy in which all our crew are versed and practise in both the UK and abroad.

In Luxor - Egypt, you have the opportunity to visit the *Sunshine International Childrens Orphanage*. Oasis is a sponsor of this independently run Childrens Orphanage – caring for underprivileged youths and orphans. For more information – please log onto www.sunshine-international.org.uk

In Cairo - Egypt, Oasis support the *Sudanese Community Development Program*. This is a charitable organisation providing education for Sudanese refugee children living in Cairo. Our Operations Manager in Egypt is one of the schools Trustees. We have held fundraising events for the school in the UK, delivered much needed educational supplies and have recently helped the school to set up a Sponsor-A-Child scheme-sponsoring a child ourselves as a company. If you are interested in child sponsorship-100% of the money donated goes to the school -please contact the Oasis office staff. We have also developed a link between the school and a school local to our office, promoting opportunities for inter-cultural understanding. For more information please log onto www.scdp-egypt.com

In Jinja – Uganda, Oasis is also involved with another local organisation run by *Soft Power Education*. People on our trips to Uganda have the opportunity to donate their time and energy to support this outstanding drive to provide education and stability to the lives of many local children. For more information – please log onto www.softpowerededucation.com

In Harare – Zimbabwe, The *Hupenyu Hutsua Childrens Home* is a new project that Oasis is associated with – assisting the locally funded childrens home with donations of food on a monthly basis. The home does not have a website and has no funding or assistance from abroad which is why Oasis aims to visit the home on every trip to Zimbabwe. Our visits are welcomed by the staff & children alike.

CURRENCY REQUIREMENTS & PERSONAL SPENDING MONEY

Tippling & Bargaining - Tipping is usually expected. Called 'baksheesh', 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. All prices are negotiable, especially in souqs and bazaars. Many travellers find it a hassle having to bargain for every thing you wish to buy, but prices are usually inflated so accept the tea or coffee offered, sit down, and if you are not happy, move on to another place. You are under no obligation to buy and don't be intimidated.

Spending money - For personal spending, budget on about £100 to £120 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.

Budget on optional side trips separately.

Currency - It is best to take half of your money in **US Dollars / Euros or Pounds cash** and half as a Credit or Debit card with a PIN number to use in ATM machines. If you are going to use a card of any sort please inform your bank before you travel that you will be in the Middle East. If you do not bring a card then you will need to bring your spending money all in cash. If you are concerned about carrying too much cash then Travellers cheques are advisable, but we have had feedback from travellers that they wished they never took them as they are difficult to change, and you will also need to bring your purchase receipt and sometimes you can get charged 2% to 5% commission when changing TC's. It is easy to get local currency from ATM machines in Turkey, and in some places in Syria BUT you can only withdraw local currency, sometimes only small amounts of about \$50 at a time Also many machines will charge you for a withdrawal and sometimes machines run out of cash or are not working. So always have some cash US\$/Euro/or GBP as a back up.

Make sure that all your notes are in good condition. Old, torn or marked notes are often refused. Do not bring \$100 notes unless they are in excellent condition and post 1996. Scottish Pounds are not accepted in Middle East.

Bring about US \$50 in cash to pay for visas and border crossings (this should be in small denominations 20's & 10's).

There is a secure safe for money on board the truck.

Things to buy - One of the highlights of a Middle East trip is the covered souqs and bazaars. There are numerous handicrafts and souvenirs including kilims (rugs), carpets, silver, gold, clothing, woven bags, silk, jewellery boxes, backgammon boards, leather goods, incense, plus much more.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

As a guide to help you budget, below are some approximate prices of most of the side activities you can do:

(Guide only as prices and exchange rates can change).

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

	(GB£)	(US\$)
Turkey		
Tandem Paraglide / Parascending	£60	\$115
Hot Air Ballooning Cappadocia	£100 -150	\$190-250
Folk/Belly dancing evening (with food & drinks)	£15	\$28
Traditional Turkish Bath	£12	\$22
Sea Kayaking	£10	\$19
River Tubing (inclds guide) (1- 1/2hrs)	£10	\$19
Ephesus Roman City entrance and guided tour	£8	\$15
Boat cruise	£6	\$11
Underground Christian City Cappadocia	£5	\$10
Gallipoli Museum and guided tour	£5	\$10
Entrance to Troy	£4	\$7
Entrance to Pamukkale	£2	\$4

Syria

Tour Krac-de-Chevaliers Crusader Castle (entry, guide, lunch)	£6	\$11
Palmyra Roman City & Museum in Syrian Desert. (Visited during winter months)	£6	\$11
Aleppo guided city tour	£2	\$4

Lebanon

One full day guided tour to the ancient Greek/Roman city of Baalbek, War Monument dedicated to the civil war, drive through 'The Green Mile' – main area of the civil war then free time in Beirut. Included - Lebanese entry visa, departure taxes, and an all-you-can-eat Mezze lunch. The total cost for this trip is US\$75 (cash only). This tour generally starts about 7 am and returns around midnight.

NOTE: Due to the political instability in Lebanon & the FCO (Foreign & Commonwealth Office) advice, this trip is not currently available.

RECOMMENDED 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 in the heat, lazing on beaches and camping in the cool, 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).

Weather Warning - Climatic variations are quite dramatic in the Middle East. November to March in both Turkey and Syria can sometimes be extremely cold in parts with snow in places. Generally May/June and September/October are good months to travel. In July and August midday temperatures can reach 35 to 40 degrees Centigrade, but nights in the desert and at altitude in Cappadocia can be quite cold so bring clothes for all seasons. However, pack extra warm clothes if travelling in Turkey from October to April.

Clothes -

- Warm clothes (for Mt Sinai & winter)
- Jacket
- Sweat shirt / jumper
- Jeans
- Socks
- Sandals/flip flops/jandals/thongs
- T shirts, Shirts & Shorts
- Shirts (to cover shoulders)
- Skirts / long trousers (to cover knees)
- Swimsuit
- Cool clothes
- Underpants

Medical kit - (bring your own basic kit, our vehicles carry a comprehensive one)

- Paracetamol / Aspirin
- Plasters
- Rehydration sachets, available from chemists or Boots
- Insect repellent containing Deet
- Suntan cream and blockout / Lip balm
- Vitamin tablets

Personal Effects -

- Sleeping Bag; 2 to 4 season bag (depending on season)
- Sleeping mat / thermorest
- Small day-pack or bag to carry your daily items
- Camera in a protective case, spare batteries, all the film 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
- Hat and sun-glasses

Toiletries - Most toiletries are available.

- Toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss.
- Shampoo and conditioner
- Moisturiser
- Soap (in a container)
- Towel
- Tampons (enough for the trip) / Contraception
- Razors

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.

RECOMMENDED READING – GUIDES – MAPS - GENERAL

Guide books -

- Lonely Planet, Rough Guide and Footprint - publish various guide books of Turkey and Syria.
- Arabic and Turkish Phrase books are also published by Lonely Planet

Maps - GEO Centre's World Map Series of Middle East

Recommended reading -

- Ataturk: The Rebirth of a Nation - Lord Kinross (Historical look at 20 Century Turkey)
- Journey to the Orient - Gerard de Nerval.
- Beyond the Pyramids - Douglas Kennedy.
- Pillars of Hercules - by Paul Theroux.
- Khul-Khal: Five Egyptian Women Tell Their Stories

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

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

18 Days Damascus to Istanbul itinerary

If you provide us with your flight arrival details **AT LEAST TWO WEEKS BEFORE YOUR DEPARTURE DATE** we can arrange for you to be met at the airport and transferred to the hotel we use in Damascus.

Day 1 – 6 Damascus - We spend three nights in this, the oldest inhabited city in the world. From here there is the option of taking a **one day guided tour into Lebanon and Beirut**. Syrians are among the most hospitable people you will ever meet. The country has a rich and varied history with the Egyptian, Roman, Babylonian and Persian Empires having all passed through here along with Jesus and his disciples! From Damascus we visit **Crac de Chevaliers - an 800-year-old Crusader Castle** - perched high on top of a mountain. Then time permitting, we travel out to the oasis town of **Palmyra** we really get into the desert proper. Sleeping out in this vast wilderness, untainted by artificial light is an experience not to be missed. Before leaving Syria our final destination is market town of **Aleppo** where you can get lost in the local **souk and discover small cafes and tea houses** and go for a relaxing bath in a **hamam**.

Day 7 – 12 Driving through stunning mountain scenery in the crisp clear days of summer, and ice and snow in winter, we wend our way into **Turkey**. From here we travel inland and upwards for a day to the visually powerful, windswept landforms of **Cappadocia**. Over the centuries houses, churches, fortresses and even underground cities have been carved into this eerily eroded volcanic rock. The **Goreme Valley** provides us with an astonishing setting in which to spend a few days investigating the region. We will take you to one of the underground cities where you can explore alone or with a guide this ancient and mysterious area! We then head towards the Turkish coast and stop on the way at **Saklikent Gorge** where there is the opportunity to go **river tubing**. We stay on the coast **Olympus** and then further down the Mediterranean coast at **Olu Deniz**. Our accommodation is **tree houses** and campsites and we spend the next couple of days relaxing on the beach. You can also take boat trips around the coast, tandem paraglide or hire small motor bikes.

Day 13 - 18 We then travel via either **Pamukkale** where you can swim in warm, mineral-rich water, or take the more visually scenic route towards **Marmaris** and camp in the mountains. We visit the well known ruins of Ephesus where we spend 2 nights. Built by the Greeks a thousand years before Christ and then rebuilt by the Romans, Ephesus boasts an amphitheatre that can seat 24000 and a harbour with no water - still in good condition after all these years. From here we visit the ruins of Troy before we cross the **Dardanelle Straits** and visit **Gallipoli**, where in World War I on this blustery and exposed peninsula, **ANZAC and British Forces** struggled unsuccessfully for nine horrendous months to dislodge Turkish troops from the hills above the beaches. It is a moving experience to visit the war graves and battlegrounds where so much suffering and unnecessary loss of life took place. Australians and New Zealanders make a pilgrimage each year on ANZAC Day to pay their respects to their fellow countrymen who died here. **We attend the dawn service on ANZAC Day as well as the memorial services at Chanuk Bair and Lone Pine.**

It is a half day drive from here to the final destination of our trip - the exiting and cosmopolitan city of **Istanbul** where we have our final night's party! Istanbul as an amazing city and staying for a couple of days after your trip finishes to experience this safe and friendly city and paying a visit to at least the **Aya Sofya Mosque, Topkapi Palace or the Grand Bazaar** to name but a few is recommended. Our crew can provide you with details and information of hostels to stay at in the Sultanhamet area of central Istanbul.

18 Days Istanbul to Damascus Itinerary

There is an amazing amount to see and do in Istanbul and as we depart Istanbul on the first morning of the trip we recommend arriving a couple of days early to experience this great, safe and friendly city and pay a visit to at least the Aya Sofya Mosque, Topkapi Palace and the Grand Bazaar to name but a few sites.

Day 1 - 5 From Istanbul we begin our journey with a half day drive through olive groves and rural settlements to **Gallipoli and the Straits of the Dardanelles**. In World War I, on this blustery and exposed peninsula, **ANZAC and British Forces** struggled unsuccessfully for nine horrendous months to dislodge Turkish troops from the hills above the beaches. It is a moving experience to visit war graves and battle grounds where so much suffering and unnecessary loss of life took place. Australians and New Zealanders make a pilgrimage each year on ANZAC day to pay their respects to their fellow countrymen who died here. **We attend the dawn service on ANZAC Day as well as the memorial services at Chanuk Bair and Lone Pine.**

From here we cross the Straits, leave Europe and enter the continent of **Asia**. We visit **Troy** on our way to **Ephesus** and spend the next 2 nights camping on the coast. Built by the Greeks a thousand years before Christ and then rebuilt by the Romans, this immense ancient city boasts an amphitheatre that can seat 24000 and a harbour with no water - still in good condition after all these years. We then travel via either **Pamukkale** where you can swim in warm, mineral-rich water, or take the more visually scenic route towards **Marmaris** and camp in the mountains.

Day 6 - 12 For most of the year we head to **Olu Deniz and Olympus** further down the Mediterranean coast. We stay in campsites and **tree houses** and spend the next couple of days **relaxing on the beach**. You can also take boat trips around the coast, tandem paraglide or hire small motor bikes and visit some of the small out of the way villages nearby. We then travel inland and upwards and stop on the way at **Saklikent Gorge** where there is the opportunity to go **river tubing**. From here we travel for a day to the visually powerful, windswept land forms of **Cappadocia**. Over the centuries houses, churches, fortresses and even underground cities have been carved into this eerily eroded, volcanic rock. The **Goreme Valley** provides us with an astonishing setting in which to spend a few days investigating the region. We will take you to one of the underground cities where you can explore alone or with a guide this ancient and mysterious area!

Day 13 - 18 Driving through stunning mountain scenery in the crisp clear days of summer, and ice and snow in winter, we wend our way to **Syria**. Syrians are among the most hospitable people you will ever meet. The country has a rich and varied history with the Egyptian, Roman, Babylonian and Persian Empires having all passed through here along with Jesus and his disciples! Our first stop in this fascinating country is the market town of **Aleppo** where you have free time to explore the **souks, local cafes and tea houses, or visit a local haamam** where you can get a relaxing steam clean! Nearby we visit **Crac de Chevaliers - an 800 year old Crusader Castle** - perched high on top of a mountain. Then time permitting, we travel out to the oasis town of **Palmyra** we really get into the desert proper. Sleeping out in this vast wilderness, untainted by artificial light is an experience not to be missed. The night sky dazzles with stars, satellites and shooting stars. On the road to **Damascus**, we head to one of the friendliest and safest of capital cities. We spend two nights in this, the oldest inhabited city in the world. From here there is the option of taking a one day guided tour into **Lebanon & Beirut**.