Dear Traveller,

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

* Trip dates
* Truck, group size, tents and luggage
* Dietary Requirements
* Passports
* Covid-19 vaccination
* Visas & Ghana visa
* Gabon
* Other paperwork
* Travel insurance
* Interim deposit

But first...

**What to expect!**

We are delighted that this will be our second Trans Africa expedition to run since the pandemic halted our trucks in their tracks in March 2020.  Our first expedition since then started in November last year, had a successful run to Cape Town and then on to Cairo where the trip finished earlier this month (although due to the situation in Sudan we had to leave the truck in Ethiopia, fly to Egypt and do that section using local transport). We hope you are thrilled to be a group member on this exciting expedition!

This is the biggest overland adventure that we run and it’s an expedition where you should expect the unexpected, with the itinerary and route regularly having to adapt and change while on the road.  This could be due to the distances covered, slow visa processing, bad roads and border crossings to name just a few!

This of course means that timings are going to have to be flexible too. This is about as far away from your average holiday as you can get, as not only will you have to get stuck in (often literally!) as you help to dig the truck out when it gets bogged down (which it will!), you all get involved in the cooking and the cleaning, as well as setting up and taking down the tents. The trip will only run well if everyone approaches it with a positive attitude and enthusiasm about pitching in and helping out – the more everyone does this, the quicker and easier everything runs, and the happier everyone will be. There will also be a lot of bush camping on this trip as far as Cape Town, which means no campsite facilities, but rather dig a hole and a ‘shower in a can’ moments will happen a lot!

Together with these challenges you should also expect numerous amazing moments, meeting local people who hardly ever see tourists, exploring stunning scenery and seeing some amazing wildlife. All in all this is going to be a really special trip that you’ll remember forever.

**Trip dates**

The Accra to Cape Town, Nairobi and Cairo trips are part of the UK to Cairo Trans Africa expedition. This is due to start in Accra on the 29th January 2024, but this is reliant on the progress made by the group travelling down from the UK.  On previous trips, the truck and group have been on time but it is important to be aware that there could be circumstances such as slow border crossings and difficult road conditions that affect their progress. Whilst our drivers always do their best to make up time from any delays, there may be a chance of a delay in the start of your trip, but we shall keep you updated closer to the time.

We recommend not finalising your flight dates back home or onwards until at least you have reached Angola (Cape Town finishers) or Zimbabwe (Nairobi and Cairo finishers) on the trip.  If booking your flight before then (and doing so may help with your Nigeria visa application), please make sure you are able to change the date if necessary and check the fees for doing this. Due to the nature of this expedition, unforeseen delays can be experienced anywhere along the route and we cannot guarantee our arrival dates at the various locations.

**Truck, group size, tents and luggage**

The maximum number in your group is 28 people, a few more than our usual group size. That is because for this trip for various logistical and truck positioning reasons, we are chartering a different vehicle with more seats than our normal vehicles (36 forward facing instead of 24 mixed). We are restricting numbers to 28 though, so there will be plenty of room and more spare seats to spread out than normal.

The general plan is for 2 people to share a 3 person tent. However, because we have the space, everyone is welcome to bring their own tent if they wish (meaning you don't need to share if you don’t want to). But if you do plan to bring your own tent, please do let us know so we can manage the number of our own tents that we bring. If you do bring your own, you will be responsible for your own tent throughout the trip (so if it needs repairs or replacing during the trip, you’ll be responsible for that, as we may not have enough spares for you). Your Tour Leader will of course assist with sourcing repairs or a new tent for you if it does come to that.

Please note that although the truck is roomy with lots of storage areas, there is a limit to space for your personal luggage and we will be full with food stocks as well as kitchen equipment, spare parts and tools etc.  So, 80 litre (100ltr max) backpacks and holdalls are the best form of carrying your luggage which will be stored in lockers accessible from the outside of the vehicle, along with a small day pack (40ltr max) that you can store on the overhead rack inside the truck. Backpacks and holdalls that have a rigid frame as well as suitcases are impractical on the truck and should not be brought. If you bring excess luggage above the recommended amount then you will need to post it home from Accra.

**Dietary Requirements** (eg.Vegetarians / Vegans / Coeliacs / Gluten & Lactose intolerance etc.)

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

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

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

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

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

**Passport pages**

You will require the following number of **blank pages** for the expedition. Please use this as an approximate guide and aim to have some spare pages for good luck.

Accra to Cape Town  - 15 blank pages
Accra to Nairobi         - 24 blank pages
Accra to Cairo       - 30 blank pages

Depending on your travel plans before the trip, this requirement may mean that you need either a new replacement passport or a second concurrent passport. A concurrent passport means a second valid passport of the same nationality in addition to your current one. Travelling with two valid passports for a trip lasting up to or more than 31 weeks can benefit you and help to obtain visas more speedily, for instance in having one passport to send home to obtain a visa whilst travelling on the second one. It is always best to use one passport as a main passport in which to obtain all possible visas and the second passport as a back up only to use when needed, or if you run out of pages. Your government in your home country that issues your passports will ask for a letter detailing why you need an extra passport.

Oasis Overland provide a detailed letter on the Trip Downloads page explaining that you will be travelling through X countries for up to X weeks and obtaining visas at the borders or from embassies in neighbouring countries (you can update the details to match your booking).

If you cannot or do not wish to obtain a concurrent passport, you may be able to apply for a new passport with more pages. In the UK you can apply for a new 50 page Frequent Traveller passport and other nationalities may have similar options.

**It’s important to look at your passport requirements now to ensure any new passport is obtained in time.**

**Visas**

You will obtain the majority of your visas ‘on the road’ due mainly to the fact that most visas have a limited validity of between 30 and 90 days beginning from the date of issue, meaning that if you obtained them before travel, they would expire before you arrive.

Currently, the visas that need to be obtained in advance before you leave home are for **Ghana**, **Nigeria** and **Cameroon**. We are providing information on how and when to apply for Ghana here, along with some other files that you will need to accompany your application. We will give you information to enable you to apply for your Nigeria and Cameroon visas in our next update.

**Ghana visa**

The Ghana visa must be obtained before travel in your country of residence and details on how to apply for this are on the following three documents:

1. **Filling in the Ghana visa form**
2. **Ghana Visa Letter and Itinerary** Please remember the itinerary is an **aid** for the visa, it is by no means exact, as once you get on the road things will change. This is simply a letter to support your visa application, so that the Ghanaian embassy is aware that we are travelling overland, not flying. It isn’t an issue once we are there if things change slightly.
3. **Ghana Booking confirmation**

Note: A 3 month Ghana visa is the only one available for some nationalities. The visa is valid for entry into Ghana within three months of the date of issue, so you would need to apply for this visa at the end of October to ensure the visa is still valid when you enter Ghana in January 2024. Some nationalities can apply for a 6 month or full year multiple entry visa which can be applied for now. This is ideal as it gives you more time for your application to be processed. When you have the visa, please double check the validity date (valid for entry until). It is not uncommon for the embassy staff to issue these visas incorrectly and for them to be set to expire before you arrive. This can normally be fixed before you leave, as long as you spot it early.

We will apply for all other visas whilst en route, either online via the country’s e-visa website or at Embassies and Consulates along the way or at the border. It’s not unusual to have to try for some visas in more than one city - you will become very used to visa applications and border crossing processes! Visa requirements can change at a moment’s notice so we will of course let you know if there are any changes and we will also include visa information for countries beyond South Africa at a later date. There are details about the visa kitty we will arrange in the pre-departure info – this basically covers the costs of photocopying, paperwork, taxis to embassies etc. during the trip, and will be open to all to view the accounting.

**Other paperwork**

There is a lot of other paperwork that you will need to prepare and bring with you (eg. Birth certificate, proof of funds, passport photos, Covid certificate, yellow fever vaccination certificate etc. etc.). We will advise you of these in more detail in later updates. However, if you know you will be away from home for a long period before the trip starts, please let us know asap. so that we can advise you of what to get ready before you leave.

**Covid-19 vaccination**

While we do not make being vaccinated against Covid-19 compulsory on our trips, we strongly recommend it. Being fully vaccinated (including any available boosters) will both protect your health, the health of other travellers and crew (through reduced risk of transmission), save the additional time and cost if any pre-entry PCR tests become necessary again, and avoid potential disruption to the itinerary. Any costs for obtaining PCR tests if required would be for you to cover. If some countries will not admit unvaccinated travellers at all, then any travellers in the group affected would need to overfly that country at their own cost. If you are not vaccinated against Covid-19 you do still have time to arrange this before the trip starts. You will also need to bring several copies of your proof of vaccination with you.

**Travel Insurance**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Gabon**

You may have read that following presidential elections at the end of August there was a military takeover of the government in Gabon. New elections are been promised but there is no timeframe yet. The country’s borders were closed but have since re-opened. The UK government is not advising against travel to Gabon. There have been reports of some tourists being temporarily detained and questioned about their reasons for being in Gabon. At this stage we have no plans to change our schedule or itinerary through Gabon. It is very early since the coup happened still (and coups like this are not uncommon in Africa these days either!) and much will change over the coming months. We will continue to monitor the situation over the months ahead and update you should any plans change.

**Interim Deposit and Balance Payments**

For those of you travelling to Nairobi or Cairo, your interim deposit payment of £600 is due on the 29th September 2023 (if you have already paid in full, thank you and please ignore the following!) You can pay this by making a bank transfer into our current account as detailed below. We will then record your financial protection on the payment.

Account Name: Uncover the World Travel Ltd.

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

Bank Name: HSBC

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

Account No: 82527693

Sort code: 40-01-06

IBAN: GB93HBUK40010682527693

SWIFT: HBUKGB4105F

Alternatively you can pay by clicking on links in your booking emails and paying by credit or debit card:

For those of you finishing in Cape Town, no interim deposit is required and the remainder of your payment is due on 30th November 2023.

If you are not intending on travelling with us on this departure after all, please do let us know as soon as possible.

We will be providing further updates over the next few weeks with details for your Nigeria and Cameroon visa applications and more pre trip preparations!