Dear Traveller,

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

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

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

But first…

**What to expect!**

We are delighted that this will be our first Trans Asia expedition to run since the pandemic prevented us from setting off in April 2020. We hope you are thrilled to be a group member on this momentous trip!

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

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

You may have to carry heavy sand mats if the truck gets bogged in sand and you will all get involved in the cooking and the cleaning, as well as setting up and taking down the tents. There will also be some bush camping on this trip, which means no campsite facilities, but rather dig a hole and a ‘shower in a can’ moments will happen! Much of the time we will stay in hostels or basic hotels and standards can vary considerably, depending on what is available to us. Upgrades to camping are available as we go along in some places we stay, but not everywhere – you need to be ready to do plenty of simple camping.
For those starting in China the whole trip will be carried out using local transport (trains, sleeper trains, coaches etc.) and budget hotels/hostels. So, there won’t be camping, but you should still expect some pretty simple and basic accommodation at times, especially in remote areas.

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

**Itinerary**

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

However, there are also some potential changes that we do know about now and need to advise you about. These include:

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

In previous years this trip has run in two ways:

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

Our preferred and planned route for this trip is to go through Azerbaijan and on the ferry.

However, we need to advise you that at the moment all of the land borders to Azerbaijan remain closed and have not re-opened since the Covid pandemic (though you can fly into the country).
The Azerbaijan authorities have advised that they plan to re-address this policy in January and we hope and expect that at least some of the border crossings will re-open then, if not all of them.
If this does not happen, then we will start to put our backup plan in place, which will be to travel through Iran. We will start the process of applying for Iran visas and there will be a cost for this to pay for the initial visa authorisation process. We will still have several months after this and before we get there for the Azerbaijan border situation to change, and we will leave it as late as possible before making our final decision about which way to go (this may not be until we get close to Tbilisi). If the borders are still all closed, we will complete the Iran visa process (again probably in Tbilisi) and travel that way instead. Depending on the time available, visa specifics and current travel advice, we may transit straight towards Mashad and out of the country, or visit places like Esfahan and Shiraz en-route.

Note - [UK Government travel advice](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/iran) does currently advise against all travel to Iran. We are expecting this to revert back to a lower level in the months ahead. However, we do need to advise you of this advice level now and recommend that you read it. We know of several overlanders that have travelled through Iran successfully recently, including with British and US citizens on board and so expect this to work fine. We have excellent local contacts and travel partners who will assist us as required. However, if we do end up having to take this route and you do not wish to travel through Iran for any reason, you may overfly at your cost and rejoin us in Turkmenistan.

* **China, Xi’an/Beijing**

This will be our first time running the trip’s route through China in exactly the way we are showing it now. Those entering China from Kyrgyzstan will leave the truck at the border and continue their trip with a tour leader using local transport and budget hotels/hostels. There may be some minor adjustments to the route based on the best current options for overnight train timings and journeys on our dates. The truck and driver will then return to Bishkek with those finishing there.
We will also be adjusting the itinerary in China for those people going on as far as Singapore so that you head north from Xi’an and visit Beijing, before returning back south again to retrace our steps through Xi’an and Chengdu and then on to Kunming. If you wish to avoid the travel to and from Beijing you will be able to remain in Xi’an until the tour leader returns from finishing the trip for everyone who will be ending in Beijing.

**Passports**

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

As a guideline, you will need at least 1 blank page per country in your passport after you have obtained the relevant visas before your trip commences.

**It’s important to look at your passport now to see if you need to obtain a new one, to ensure it is obtained in time.** We will require your passport details and/or a copy of it in order to apply for letters of invitation (LOIs) and this must be the passport you will be travelling on. For those of you travelling between Tbilisi and Ashgabat, **we will need these by 5th January 2024**.

**Visas**

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

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

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

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

**Iran**

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

**Turkmenistan**

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

**China**

All nationalities require a visa for China and again, our local operator will provide a Letter of Invitation and Travel Plan to support your application. In the UK, you cannot apply more than 3 months before entry which means the earliest date is 2nd April 2024. It is recommended to apply in your home country as most people need to go in person to a visa centre or embassy to provide finger prints. Additionally, if you apply somewhere where you are not resident, it’s not always possible to know in advance how long your visa will be valid for, as their rules regarding this frequently change. If you will not be in your home country at the beginning of April, we suggest you investigate which Embassy or Consulate you will be able to apply at and what their requirements are.

Letters of Invitation for the above visas are included in the cost of your trip.

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

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

**Turkey**

British, New Zealand and Swiss passport holders do not require a visa

Australian, US and South Africa passport holders can apply for an e-visa. The earliest you can apply is 3 months before entering Turkey: <https://www.evisa.gov.tr/>

**Georgia**

British, Australian New Zealand, US, South Africa, Swiss, German and Irish passport holders do not require a visa.

**Armenia**

British, Australian New Zealand, US, Swiss, German and Irish passport holders do not require a visa.

South African passport holders require a visa. You can apply for an e-visa in advance: <https://evisa.mfa.am/>:

In the past, it has also been possible to obtain the visa on arrival at the border.

**Azerbaijan**

British, Australian New Zealand, US, South Africa, Swiss, German and Irish require an e-visa which we would apply for en route: <https://evisa.gov.az/en/>

**Uzbekistan**

British, Australian New Zealand, Swiss, German and Irish do not require a visa.

US and South African passport holders require a visa. This should be a **multiple entry** visa as our itinerary takes us through Uzbekistan twice. If the visa is valid for entry for 90 days, you must not apply before 7th March 2024.

**Tajikistan**

Australian, New Zealand, US, Swiss and German passport holders do not require a visa.

British, US, South African and Irish passport holders need an e-visa which you can apply for after 15th March.

**Kyrgyzstan**

British, Australia, New Zealand, US, Swiss, German and Irish passport holders do not require a visa.

South African passport holders require a visa. This should be a multiple entry visa as our itinerary takes us through Kyrgyzstan twice. If the visa is valid for entry for 90 days, you must not apply before 20th March 2024.

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

**Kazakhstan**

British, Australian, New Zealand, US, Swiss, German and Irish passport holders do not require a visa.

South Africans will need to apply for a tourist visa from a Kazakh Embassy (e-visas are only valid when arriving at certain airports). You may need a Letter of Invitation to support your application. If the visa is valid for entry for 90 days, you must not apply before 25 March. We suggest you contact the Kazakhstan Embassy in Pretoria to check the exact requirements and timescales.

For those continuing to Singapore, all South East Asia countries that we visit are either visa free or can be applied for en route, either as an e-visa, at an Embassy or on arrival.

**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 required to obtain any possible pre-entry PCR tests and avoid potential disruption to the itinerary. Some countries on the route may still require negative PCR tests before entry for unvaccinated travellers and obtaining these will be at your cost should you need them. 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 should also bring some 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 website](https://safetywing.com/nomad-insurance) and purchase a policy for a minimum of 5 days each time.

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

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

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

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

Your interim deposit payment of £600 is due on the 17th December 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 contacting our sales team and requesting a credit card payment link.

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

We hope that all this information proves helpful.

Best wishes,

The Oasis Overland team