Dear Traveller,

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

1. Beijing finish date extended
2. China visa update
3. Azerbaijan/Iran route & Iran visas
4. Turkmenistan Visas

There are actions required now for anyone whose route will travel through Iran and Turkmenistan.

Best wishes, Oasis Overland

1. **Beijing Finish Date**

*Only applies to people finishing in Beijing.*

All of our long trips have an amount of flexibility in them and we ask that you take that into account when making onward plans after the trip is scheduled to finish. On this year’s trip we now expect to be arriving into Beijing early in the morning of the 23rd July on the sleeper train from Xi’an. From there we will head straight out to visit the Great Wall and then return to Beijing to overnight. **For those people finishing in Beijing, the trip will therefore end after breakfast in the morning of 24th July. That is one day later than our published dates.** Please take this into account when making any further travel plans and flight bookings.

1. **China visa**

Just a reminder that there is nothing to do yet for your China visa 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 in early April, we suggest you investigate which Embassy or Consulate you will be able to apply at and what their requirements are.

1. **Azerbaijan / Iran route**

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

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

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

The idea is that this will be a relatively quick transit over about 9 days, with just a couple of days exploring Esfahan en-route. To account for the missed time in Azerbaijan and western Turkmenistan we will add some extra days exploring Georgia and Armenia.

**Considerations about travel through Iran**

1. **Visas**

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

1. **Government travel advice**

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

As we mentioned in our last update, we know of several overlanders that have travelled through Iran successfully recently, including with British and US citizens on board. We have excellent local contacts and travel partners who will assist us as required. However, if you do not wish to travel through Iran for any reason, you may overfly at your cost and rejoin us in Turkmenistan.

1. **Travel Insurance**

Having, and being able to provide proof of travel insurance is a requirement for entering Iran and getting your visa issued. The travel advice of the British Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) as well as governments of other countries 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. Currently, Iran is the only country on our route that the FCDO advises against all travel to. In addition, international sanctions can also affect whether some companies offer cover as well. There are however some insurance companies who will still provide cover. These include our Iranian partners who will probably provide the most cost effective option (normally between EUR 20-60, available to all nationalities). Medical cover is up to EUR 10,000. You would apply here (no rush to do this yet though). <https://explore.tappersia.com/insurance/apply>

For UK residents looking at higher levels of cover you could check Voyager Insurance. Instant quotes are available from their website –

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

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

1. **Overflying Iran**

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

* We expect to leave Yerevan in Armenia in the morning of 19th May
* We expect to arrive in Ashgabat in Turkmenistan in the afternoon of 28th May

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

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

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

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

1. **Turkmenistan Visas**

*Does not apply to Bishkek, Kashgar or Xi’an starters*

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

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

**Scans**

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

 **Information**

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

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

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