Dear Traveller

It’s just a few weeks until our Central Asia expedition starts in Istanbul. This update is a long one but please ensure you read it all as it contains important information about your trip.

Firstly, your crew for this adventure, who have all worked for us for many years – Mark Dawson will be your Tour Leader and Alan Lloyd is your Driver whilst you are on our expedition truck in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Both are extremely experienced crew and have run many successful trips together in Africa, Central Asia and the Middle East, including our Trans Africa and Nile Trans Cape Town to Cairo trips and both were crew on our 2017 Trans Asia expedition. They are great guys and make a fantastic team! You will be met in China by another of our top Tour Leaders, Alexis. Having led truck trips and small group adventures on all 3 continents that we operate in over several years, Alexis is hugely experienced. She has previously run our Xi’an to Singapore trip and also has travelled extensively in the region on her personal travels.

***Actions to take now:***

* Istanbul starters: **Note the change of joining hostel below**
* Those travelling through Iran: **If you have not already, apply online for your Iran authorisation number (see below)**
* Those travelling through China: **Email us a scan of your China visa**

***For the following, please see previous update 3 on the*** [***Trip Downloads page***](https://www.oasisoverland.co.uk/trip-downloads)***:***

* Those starting in Istanbul: **Apply online for your e-visa if required**
* Those travelling through Armenia: **Apply online for your e-visa if required**
* Those travelling through Iran: **You should have applied for your Iran visa already. If you haven’t, please do this as soon as possible**
* Those overflying Iran: **Let us know your flight details into Ashgabat when you have them confirmed please**
* Those travelling through Uzbekistan: **Apply online for your e-visa if required**
* Those travelling through Tajikistan: **Apply online for your e-visa if required**
* Everyone: **Check other countries on your trip to see if you require a visa**

**Istanbul – change of starting hotel**

Unfortunately, the Cheers Lighthouse has not been able to accommodate us and so we will now meet on day 1 at the Sultan Hostel:

***Sultan Hostel & Guesthouse***

***Address :****Cankurtaran Mahallesi Akbıyık Caddesi, Terbıyık Sk. No:3, 34122 Sultanahmet/Fatih/İstanbul, Türkiye*

***E-Mail :****info@sultanhostel.com*

***Phone :****+ 90 212 516 92 60*

***Mobile:****+ 90 212 516 92 61*

[*https://www.sultanhostel.com/*](https://www.sultanhostel.com/)

You can book pre-trip accommodation directly with the hostel.

Mark and Al will be at the Sultan Hostel from 16th April. If you need to contact Mark once you are in Istanbul, you can Whatsapp him on +61417867219. Please remember to tell him who you are!

Our UK 24 hour emergency number if you can’t reach him is +44 203 633 3041.

**Tbilisi starting hotel**

***Envoy Hostel***

***Address****: 45 Betlemi St., Tbilisi, 0105*

***Phone****: +995-322-920-111*

[*www.envoyhostel.com*](http://www.envoyhostel.com)

You can book pre-trip accommodation directly with the hostel

**Ashgabat starting hotel**

***Ak Altyn Hotel***

***Address:*** *Magtymguly Avenue No.140/1, Ashgabat, 744000*

***Telephone:*** *+993-12 36 37 00*

***Email:*** *info@akaltyn.com*

[*www.akaltyn.com*](http://www.akaltyn.com)

Double, twin and single en suite rooms cost £65 per person including a buffet breakfast. Due to strict regulations concerning tourism in Turkmenistan, it is a requirement that all travellers use the designated hotel in Ashgabat before their trip starts, where we are registered with a local authorised tour operator. Hotel costs must be paid in full to Oasis Overland before departure

Please advise us of your flight arrival details and room preference and this will be provided subject to availability. Where possible, those travelling solo will be put in shared rooms with other Oasis Overland travellers to reduce the costs to them.

**Those starting their trip in Ashgabat** – the airport transfer is included in the cost of your trip.

**Those flying over Iran and meeting us in Ashgabat** – the airport transfer is extra and costs £25 (we may be able to reduce this a little if several people arrive at the same time – we will collate and batch transfers if possible).

On arrival into Ashgabat airport you will be met by a local representative who will take you to the group joining hotel, where you will need to present your passport and be registered with the Turkmenistan Tourism Authorities. The driver will have your name on a sign with Oasis Overland.

**Iran visa application**

If you have not yet applied online for your Iran authorisation number please do so immediately. You can find instructions for this in update 3 on our [Trip Downloads](https://www.oasisoverland.co.uk/trip-downloads) page.

Those starting their trip in Istanbul and Tbilisi will collect their visa all together in Tbilisi. If you are joining later than this (e.g. Yerevan) you will need to collect your visa before joining us.

**China visa**

We hope you are all getting on ok with your China visa applications. It seems that the format of the application form in some countries may have changed shortly after we sent our last email and application guide. If you have any questions about how to fill in the form, just let us know (eg. If you can’t find Kashgar to add as your start location or Mohan to list as your final departure point, just enter Beijing). When you have your visa, please send us a colour scan/photo of it. We will need this in order to apply for your Tibet permit.

If you already have this visa from a previous visit, please send us a colour scan/photo. If it is in an old passport that you’re not using for travelling, please also send a colour scan of the old passport. ***You must bring this old passport with you on the trip.***

**Tents and personal luggage**

The general plan is for 2 people to share a 3 person dome tent. However, you are welcome to bring your own tent if you 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 it throughout the trip (so if it needs repairs or replacing during the trip, you’ll be responsible for that, as we may not have had 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 all the kitchen equipment, spare parts & tools etc.  So, 80 litre backpacks and holdalls are the best form of carrying your luggage which will be stored in lockers, along with a small day pack (40ltr max). Backpacks and holdalls that have a rigid frame as well as suitcases are impractical on the truck, will not fit in your locker, and should not be brought. If you bring excess luggage above the recommended amount then you will need to post it home from your joining city.

Please remember that if you are travelling into China and beyond, that we are not with the truck anymore and you will be carrying your own luggage between hotels, train stations, transfer vehicles etc. So, you need to make sure you only bring what you are comfortable carrying for a walk of at least say 30mins (it would be very rare that would be required for so long, but there may be some places it is necessary, potentially at the Kyrgyzstan/China border for example).

If you bring your own tent and are carrying on into China and beyond (when we leave the truck behind and continue with local transport), then as we do not plan for the truck to return to the UK this winter (i.e. we can’t bring tents back to the UK for you), you have a couple of choices...

* Continue carrying your tent with you, potentially to post home at a later date from a city in China
* Leave the tent on the truck. We will keep it as a backup for use by other travellers if needed until we get to a suitable place on our route where we can donate it to a worthy cause en-route (eg. a local family or school that we may stay with or pass by).

**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. Whilst on the truck, 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 Central Asia.

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 may be able to find 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 may 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.

A lot of meals in South East Asia are cooked using nut oil. If you are allergic to nuts, it is a good idea to bring with you some small cards with information about your allergy written in the local language. These can be easily sourced and purchased online.

**Document copies to take with you on the expedition**

Please bring **10 colour photocopies of your passport ID pages** to give to your tour leader. These are often required by hotels we stay at. You will also need 2 copies of your travel insurance for your Iran visa application (it is always good to bring copies of your travel insurance docs in case you need to claim for anything during the trip anyway).

It’s also a good idea to have a digital copy of your passport and passport photo in case these are needed for any visa applications made online during the trip, along with a copy of your vaccination certificates, including Covid. We would also suggest you take a paper copy of your passport and travel insurance and some spare passport photos. Those travelling on to South East Asia will need these digital and hard copies (see further details below).

**Local Payment**

Your tour leader Mark will collect your Local Payment on Day One. Please remember that this must be paid in US$ Dollars **cash only**. Make sure that all your notes are in good condition. Old, torn or marked notes are often refused by the banks and we will therefore be unable to accept them either. Please do not bring all of your Local Payment in US$100 notes and also make sure they are dated post 2013 and do not have a serial number starting with CB.

If you are flying over Iran, your Local Payment amount will be reduced byUSD 250. Please remember 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.

**Passenger Liability Insurance**

As a company we do our best to have the best possible level of insurance in place to protect our travellers and our operations. That includes a comprehensive tour operators liability insurance policy which protects all of our trips. We also try to obtain passenger liability insurance to cover our liability for your time on the vehicle itself, including any accidents. However, as we make clear in our booking conditions, this type of insurance is not always available or adequate in some countries.

We have done extensive research over the last couple of years through insurance companies and brokers both here in the UK and in several different countries, and unfortunately the situation is that there simply is not any passenger liability insurance cover available at all now for us to purchase in advance for most of our route. The main policy that used to provide cover for overland companies like us before Covid is simply not available anymore. We will attempt to purchase insurance at each border we cross, and sometimes this is possible (albeit with a very low level of cover), but this will not be available everywhere. As a responsible operator we wanted to bring this to your attention before the trip starts.

**Travel Insurance and Government Travel Advice**

As previously mentioned in our first email, the British Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) as well as governments of other countries aim to provide advice and security information for their citizens and this advice could affect your travel insurance policy. For example, if the FCDO is advising against ‘all or non essential travel’ to a particular country, your travel insurance may not cover you for travel through that country or a specific area of a country highlighted by the FCDO.

Please remember to check that your personal 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.

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

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: <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.

**More on Government Travel Advice**

It’s important to remember that 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.  Additionally, our intended routes may change whilst on the road. Oasis Overland have been travelling through these areas for nearly 20 years and have gained a lot of experience and local knowledge. We have local contacts in many areas and others who travel these routes (which may be companies and/or individuals) readily share information. We are also able to contact the FCDO directly and have in the past met with them to pass on information of areas we have travelled through.

First and foremost, the safety of our clients and crew is paramount and we take it very seriously. Things can change and our local contacts on the ground can inform us should an area become unsafe to travel through, often more quickly than the FCDO. One of the advantages of travelling overland in our own expedition vehicle and being flexible is that we can change our itinerary on the rare occasions this is needed. When this is not possible, then the group would need to fly over at their own expense but this is extremely rare.

Apart from Iran, the only other FCDO advisory currently in place is for non-essential travel to the Southern Songkhla province of Thailand. We drive through here briefly for approximately 50kms from Hat Yai to the Malaysia border.

**South East Asia Visas**

Currently,British, New Zealand, Australian and United States passport holders can apply for e-visas online in advance or at the relevant border for any necessary visas. As most visas are valid for entry between 60 and 90 days from date of issue, it is currently too early to apply for these visas.

For those travelling to South East Asia with us, please ensure you have digital copies of your passport bio page and a passport sized photo with you to upload when applying online during the trip. These copies should be good quality and clear with all information visible. Ensure your photo is recent and that you have a neutral expression and no headwear.

As an example, these are the photo requirements for the Malaysia e-visa:

1. File format using \*.JPEG/ .JPG/ .PNG in color.
2. Min. 400x600px.
3. Max. size 2Mb
4. Proper composition.



The top of the head, including the hair, to the bottom of the chin must be between 50% and 60% of the image's total height. The eye height (measured from the bottom of the image to the level of the eyes) should be between 50% and 60% of the image's height.

It’s also a good idea to have some hardcopy passport photos in case they are needed.

Your Tour Leader will give you more information at a later date but in the meantime the following brief information applies to British, New Zealand, Australian and US citizens.

There are two visas that we suggest you apply for in advance, Laos and Vietnam. However it is too early to apply now or they will expire before you reach each country. **You should not apply before 31st May for these visas:**

**Laos**– All nationalities must apply for an e-visa which costs $50. The visa is valid for entry for 60 days from the date of issue.

Although you can apply up to 3 days before entering Laos, it’s advisable to apply earlier than this, preferably before you reach China as internet can be difficult there.

You can apply for your e-visa here: <https://laoevisa.gov.la/index>

**Vietnam –** British passport holders do not currently require a visa but US, Australian and New Zealand passport holders do. An e-visa costs $25 and you can apply here: <https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/web/guest/trang-chu-ttdt>

The following visas will be applied for once you have started the South East Asia section of your trip:

**Cambodia** **–** E-visa or at the border costs $36

**Thailand -** No visa required for most nationalities

**Malaysia -** No visa required for most nationalities

**Indonesia** - E-visa or visa on arrival costs 500,000 rupiah (approx £25 or $35)

**Singapore -** No visa required for most nationalities