19 Mar 25

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 including further visa applications and Istanbul joining instructions.

Firstly, your crew for this adventure, who have both worked for us for many years – Alexis Vgeros will be your Tour Leader and Alan Lloyd is your Driver. Both are extremely experienced crew and have run many successful trips in Africa, Central Asia, the Middle East and South America over several years. Al drove our Trans Asia 2024 expeditions from Istanbul to Bishkek and back and Alexis led the section from Kashgar to Singapore last year, as well as our small group trips through the ‘Stans in 2013. They are both looking forward to meeting you in Istanbul!

**VISAS**

**Turkey**

If you require a visa, you can now apply, any time up to 48 hours before entering.

You can check if you do need one by starting the application on the evisa website:

<https://www.evisa.gov.tr/>

**Georgia**

Most nationalities are visa free but check here:

<https://migration.commission.ge/index.php?article_id=160&clang=1>

**Armenia**

Most nationalities do not require a visa. You can check yours by starting an application on the evisa website: <https://www.mfa.am/en/visa/>

Canadian passport holders require a visa. We suggest you apply for a 120 day e-visa which you can do now at <https://evisa.mfa.am/>.

You will need to make a hotel reservation to support your application. We suggest you make an online hotel booking which you can cancel at a later date at no cost:

* Use a hotel booking service such as Booking.com to book the following nights:
* 3 nights in Yerevan 1st, 2nd and 3rd May
* Choose a hotel that **does not require Pre-payment** and has **no cancellation fees**.
* Once your visa application has been processed and approved, **return to your hotel bookings and cancel them**.

You will also need our supporting letter accompanying this update to explain that you are travelling overland and do not have a flight into or out of Armenia. Please note that the itinerary is for visa purposes only and is longer than we actually plan to stay in the country to allow for delays.

The following information will assist with your application:

Date of entry: 1st May 2025

Date of departure: 10th May 2025

Contact information in Armenia: The address and phone number of the hotel you have booked in Yerevan.

**Iran**

You should by now have sent your details for your Visa Authorisation Number to our Iran operator, TAP Persia. If you have not yet, please do so immediately. You can find instructions for this in update 3.

Once you receive your Authorisation Number, please send us a copy or advise us of the date stated under **Visa Grant Validity.**

Please also check that it states you should submit your passport to the Iran Embassy in Tbilisi (unless you chose a different embassy to apply for the visa). This is where we will apply for the Iran visa during the trip.

If you plan to overfly Iran, please make sure you have told us this and let us now your flight details into Ashgabat for 21st May.

**Turkmenistan**

Our Turkmenistan operator is in the process of applying for your LOI. Those arriving overland from Iran will obtain their visa at the border as a group. Those arriving by air will use their LOI to obtain their visa at Ashgabat airport on arrival and we will send details about this with your LOI once we receive it.

**Uzbekistan**

Most nationalities do not require a visa. You can check yours by starting an application here: <https://e-visa.gov.uz/>

US passport holders require a visa. We understand this does not apply to over 55s. Please note you will only need a single entry e-visa which you can apply for here: <https://e-visa.gov.uz/>

The following information will assist with your application:

Arrival Date: 25 May 2025

Departure date: 03 Jun 2025

Preliminary place of residence in Uzbekistan:

**Tajikistan**

Many nationalities do not require a visa however, everyone will need to apply for a GBAO permit for our journey along the Pamir Highway.

* If you can get a visa in advance, then you can apply for the GBAO permit at the same time – please tick the applicable box to get them together.
* If you do not need a visa, then you will get the GBAO permit in Dushanbe – please see notes below about this.

You can check if you need a visa here: <https://www.consular.tj/visa-system-with-foreign-countries.aspx>.

UK passport holders do currently require an e-visa. You should now apply for this online along with your GBAO permit.

Some Tajikistan visa approvals come through quickly but most take a few weeks, often with requests for further information and sometimes they are rejected. There seems to be little rhyme or reason behind who gets asked for more info and who doesn’t. Our Tajikistan agent can provide a Letter of Invitation (LOI) to assist with getting your visa approved for an additional fee of US$25.

Our agent can also help should your application be rejected. In this case you would need to make another online visa application (including payment for the visa) and pay a fee of US$50 to our agent.

You have 2 options:

1 - Just get the LOI to start with and hope that is enough. If you get the visa, then you will just need to pay the $25 locally for the LOI. However, f you don't get the visa, then you can pay another $50 to help expedite the process. You would then pay $75 to our local agent when you get there. We find this second stage always works, but often isn't needed, it’s a bit of a lottery with Tajik visas.

2 - From the start, commit to $75 and expect a smoother process

You can also apply without an LOI but if you are asked for one, it may be difficult to then add it to your application.

Please advise us if you would like our agent to provide a Letter of Invitation and visa support by **25th March**.

You should apply for your e-visa here: [www.evisa.tj](https://www.evisa.tj/index.evisa.html)

If you have asked for an LOI ($25), please wait until you receive it from us and upload it with your application. If you want to add the extra expediting service (extra $50), then after completing your application, please send us your Application ID so that our agent can follow it up from their end.

The following information will help you complete the form:

* GBAO Permit: Yes
* Purpose of visit type: Tourism
* Entry: Single
* Date of arrival: 1st June (will be later but allows us leeway to be early)
* Address in Tajikistan: Green House Hostel, Khusravi Dehlavi 98a, Dushanbe, 734024

**GBAO permit for those who do not need a visa** – we will apply for this in advance through our Tajikistan agent and we will collect the permits on arrival in Dushanbe. The cost of the permit is $20, payable in cash to our agent when you get to Dushanbe

**Kyrgyzstan**

Most nationalities are visa free but check your nationality here: <https://www.evisa.e-gov.kg/get_information.php?lng=en>

**Kazakhstan**

Most nationalities are visa free for a stay of up to 30 days but you can check your nationality here: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mfa/press/article/details/6764?lang=en>

**China**

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.***

**CAMPING, ACCOMMODATION and UPGRADES**

As you will have seen on our website, you will be staying in a mix of accommodation types from campsites and wild camping, to hostels and basic hotels and the occasional yurt, family stay or guesthouse. In some of these you will sleep in dorms. We always aim for same sex dorms but sometimes this is not possible and you will be sleeping in a mixed dorm.

If you want to upgrade from shared rooms to a private room (for singles or couples), you can do that when you arrive at each location, based on availability at the time. Your Tour Leader is not going to be able to pre-book various private rooms in advance.

If you do upgrade and you are staying in the same place as the rest of the group, then you will be able to use the amount we have paid for your original room, bed or camping spot, towards your upgraded room **IF** the property allows us to do that. Sometimes they will but sometimes they won’t, and this is not something we can control. If you stay somewhere else completely, away from the main group, then you will need to cover all your costs for that.

While we are camping, you will be assigned a tent partner (same sex) to share with. If you want to have a tent to yourself, you are welcome to bring your own. But please advise us in advance if you are going to do this.

Your first night on the trip in Istanbul, 7th April, will be in a dorm room at the Cheers Lighthouse hostel, potentially a mixed dorm.

Please be aware that if you have booked a private room before the trip start, you will need to switch to the dorm room on 7th April or arrange to stay in your room and pay the difference. Please let us know if you wish to do this.

**JOINING IN ISTANBUL**

The joining point for the trip is at the Cheers Lighthouse Hostel in Istanbul:

Cheers Lighthouse - Istanbul

Address: Kucuk Ayasofya Mahallesi, Cayiroglu Sokak No:18-22, Istanbul, 34400

Telephone: +90 212 458 2324

Email: info@cheerslighthouse.com

We will have a meet and greet in the hostel at **6pm on the 6th April** where you will meet your crew, hand over your local payment and carry out some paperwork. We’ll then have a pre-departure meeting with a briefing on the trip at **9am on the 7th April**. Please let us know if you will not be able to make either meeting for some reason.

Once you are in Istanbul, you can WhatsApp Alexis on + 1 (305) 582-0703. Please remember to tell her who you are!

**Tbilisi and Ashgabat joiners**

We will confirm your joining instructions at a later date.

**MUSEUM PASS IN TURKEY**

A museum pass is available which allows entry to sites across Turkey. There are various options available which you can see and purchase here: <https://muze.gov.tr/MuseumPass>

The MuseumPass Turkiye costs €165, covers all the sites we visit in Turkey and will save you money on entrance fees (these come to €190 for those outside Istanbul alone). It’s also more convenient for you when entering the sites.

**PHONE APPS**

You may wish to download the following apps to your phone. These can be very helpful while you are travelling, and it is often easier to set them up before you leave home. Do ask a friend or family member for assistance if this is not a familiar process:

* Yandex Go - ride sharing and delivery for Georgia, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan
* Bolt - ride sharing in Georgia
* DiDi - ride sharing in China
* WeChat – messaging in China (Whatsapp does not work in China)
* Alipay for making payments in China
* VPN – there are various free and paid VPN apps available. These will provide you with a secure internet connection and allow you to change your phone’s internet location setting (useful when in Iran and China in particular to let other Apps work when they otherwise may not).

**Payments in China:** it’s good to have both WeChat and Alipay set up to make payments. Cash is becoming harder to use in some places as most locals pay with their phones now. Some shops will not accept cash or won’t have change to give you. We suggest downloading an app such as Wechat Cash or Alipay (TourCard). Both are available for foreigners to use. Many stores don't have card readers and so won't accept physical card payments or payments via international phone apps like Apple Pay.

**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 (having travel insurance is a condition for entering Iran – most people get this from TAP Persia when applying for their visa). 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.

**LOCAL PAYMENT**

Your tour leader 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, or cut your trip short and finish early, then the normal rules will apply and there will be no refunds of local payment amounts.

**LUGGAGE**

Please remember 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, kitchen equipment, spare parts & tools etc.  So, 80 litre (100ltr max) backpacks and holdalls are the best form of carrying your luggage which will be stored in lockers under your seat, 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 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.

**INSURANCE**

**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 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 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 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.

Currently, **Iran** is the only country on our route that the FCDO advises against all travel to. If you are travelling through Iran with us, please read the guidance carefully and follow recent updates, in particular the ‘Safety and Security’ and ‘Activities that put you at risk’ sections. You must follow any instructions provided by our crew and our Iranian guide at all times, especially around dress codes, behaviour, photography and independent exploration during any free time. We will not be able to provide any assistance if you are questioned or taken into custody by the local authorities if they consider any behaviour suspicious. We should point out though that we travelled through Iran twice last year on a very similar rout with our groups, without any problems at all. All our travel plans are registered and approved by the local authorities and arranged in partnership with our local Iranian tour operator partners TAP Persia, who will provide a guide to accompany us.

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/iran>

**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. Contact [Tap Persia](https://www.tappersia.com/) for details or to apply.

For UK residents looking at higher levels of cover you could check Voyager Insurance: <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.

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.