23 May 25

Dear Oasis Traveller,

First of all many thanks for booking your upcoming Central 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:

* What to expect
* Itinerary
* Passports
* Visas
* Travel insurance

*Note: We will be sending this update to everyone booked on various different legs of the trip, from the full Bishkek to Istanbul 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!**

This is one of the more challenging 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 2 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.

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.

We hope you are thrilled to be a group member on this exciting trip!

**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:

* **Turkmenistan to Istanbul section**

At the moment we only have a handful of people travelling on beyond Ashgabat to Tbilisi, and from there to Istanbul. If we do not get more bookings, we may need to cancel the final section of the trip, or amend the way we run it somewhat. We will be in touch directly with those travellers affected.

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

In the years before Covid we have run this in two ways, and we describe both routes on our website:

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

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).

If, as expected, the land borders do not open, then we will travel through Iran. We will start the process of applying for Iran visas soon and there will be a cost for this to pay for the initial visa authorisation process. We will still have several weeks after this and before we get there for the Azerbaijan border situation to change, so that will remain a possible option if we aren’t happy about the situation in Iran. If the Azerbaijan land borders are still all closed (or if they have re-opened but the ferry is not available or running), we will complete the Iran visa process and travel that way.

Note: Both our eastbound and westbound trips in 2024 travelled through Iran, and our current eastbound trip has just spent 2 weeks in Iran and entered Turkmenistan. All 3 trips ran smoothly and everyone who went through Iran found it a real highlight of their trip.

However, we do need to advise you that [UK Government travel advice](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/iran) does currently advise against **all** travel to Iran. Our previous three successful trips through Iran have had both British and US citizens on board without problems, and so we expect this to be the same for your trip. We have excellent local contacts and travel partners who will assist us as required. All our travel through the country is registered with the local tourist authorities and we have an official Iranian guide on board with us too.
However, we do need to advise you of this advice and recommend that you read it carefully. If you do not wish to travel through Iran for any reason, you may overfly at your cost and rejoin us in Armenia or Georgia.

**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 (2 pages for Tajikistan) after you have obtained any required 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 to Turkmenistan and those travelling between Turkmenistan and Georgia, **we will need these by 16th June 2025**.

**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 Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Iran:

**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 July. Our local operator in Iran obtains the authorisation codes on our behalf. This can be a long process for some nationalities 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 Iranian Embassy/Consulate. We will advise before you apply which embassy/consulate we would plan to finalise the process (last year we did this in Bishkek).

**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 will start this LOI process in June, so please look out for our next update with information and instructions about what we will need from you. .

**Tajikistan**

Most nationalities do not require a visa. You can check yours here: <https://www.consular.tj/vizoviy-rejim.aspx>. However, everyone will need to apply for a GBAO permit for our journey along the Pamir Highway.

British and South African passport holders do need an e-visa which you can apply for mid-June. The initial online application is relatively simple and some visa approvals come through quickly but most take a few weeks 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 assist with getting our visas approved by issuing a Letter of Invitation (LOI) and following up directly with the authorities. There are additional charges for this which we will advise you about closer to when you make your application.

We will send further details about how to apply for the e-visa and the GBAO permit in a later update.

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.

**Kyrgyzstan**

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

**Kazakhstan**

Most nationalities do not require a visa. You can check yours here: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mfa/activities/3053?lang=en&parentId=3051>

**Uzbekistan**

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

US passport holders (under 55 years of age only) and South African passport holders require a visa. The e-visa is available to US passport holders however South Africans must apply with an embassy. If the visa is valid for entry for 90 days, you must not apply before mid June.

**Azerbaijan**

Most nationalities require an e-visa which we would apply for en route if the land borders are open and we can enter the country by ferry. Further details will be sent once our route is confirmed.

**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 and South African passport holders require a visa. You can apply for an e-visa in advance and we will provide further details to assist your application.

**Georgia**

Most nationalities do not require a visa. You can check yours here: <https://geoconsul.gov.ge/en/entering-georgia>

**Turkey**

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

Australian and South African passport holders require an e-visa. The earliest you can apply is 3 months before entering Turkey (end of July).

**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 and this advice could affect your travel insurance policy. This means that if at times the FCDO (or your home country’s government) is advising against “all or non-essential travel” to a particular country or specific area of it, most travel insurance companies will not cover the policy holder for travel through that area. 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 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 (normally just Iran).

**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.

Please note that SafetyWing does not offer travel insurance for Iran. If we do go through Iran, then we will advise you of alternative options. These include a policy provided via our local partners which provides emergency medical coverage while in the country.

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.

We hope that all this information proves helpful.

Best wishes,

The Oasis Overland team