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TBILISI TO BISHKEK (70 DAYS) CAUCASUS TO KYRGYZSTAN



COUNTRIES VISITED: GEORGIA, IRAN, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, TAJIKISTAN, TURKMENISTAN, UZBEKISTAN, ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover the ancient wine-growing region of Telavi
- Enjoy the capital of Armenia, Yerevan with its cafes, museums and world-famous brandy
- Visit the bubbling and sometimes explosive mud volcanoes found in Azerbaijan (route dependent)
- Take a journey across the Caspian Sea (route dependent)
- Yangykala Canyon and Balkan Mountains in Turkmenistan (route dependent)
- Explore the markets and bazaars of Tabriz & Tehran (route dependent)
- See the mosques, bridges and squares in Esfahan (route dependent)
- Feel the intense heat coming from the Darwaza Gas Crater
- Explore the ancient medressas, mausoleums and mosques in Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand
- Drive through both the Fann Mountains and Pamir Highway in Tajikistan, with time for day hikes
- Enjoy the stunning mountain scenery and alpine lakes throughout Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan
- Visit the oldest bazaar in Central Asia in the city of Osh
- Take a swim in Lake Issyk-Kul, the world's second largest Alpine lake
- Enjoy the stunning mountain scenery and alpine lakes throughout Kyrgyzstan

INCLUDES

- Accommodation - approx. 60% camping & 40% simple hostels/hotels/homestays
- Caspian Sea Ferry (route dependent)
- Turkmenistan Letter of Invitation support and fees
- Ashgabat city tour
- Darvaza Gas Crater
- Yurt Stays at Altyn Arashan and Lake Song Kol
- Traditional eagle hunting display in Kyrgyzstan
- Meals - approx. 50%
- All Transport on Oasis Expedition Truck
- Camping and Cooking equipment
- Services of Oasis Crew

EXCLUDES

- Visas
- Optional Excursions as listed in the Pre-Departure Information
- Flights
- Airport Taxes & Transfers
- Travel insurance (compulsory, get a quote here)
- Meals - approx. 50%
- Drinks
- Tips

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

ARRIVAL & ACCOMMODATION

Trip Joining Point: Envoy Hostel - Tbilisi

Start Time Day 1: 08:00

Address: 45 Betlemi St., Tbilisi, 0105

Telephone: +995-322-920-111

Website: www.envoyhostel.com

All prices listed are approximate and subject to limited availability.

Room Type	Price	Description
8 Bed Dorm	US$8.00	Shared Facilities
6 Bed Dorm	US$10.00	Shared Facilities
Single, Twin or Double room	US$32.00	Shared Facilities

The trip starts from the Envoy Hostel at approximately 8am on the morning of Day 1 of your trip.

A clean and well-located hostel in the Old Town of Tbilisi, within easy walking distance of the city's bars, restaurants, and many sights. All rooms are air-conditioned and breakfast is included, with free Wi-Fi also available. The Envoy Hostel will also offer an airport pick-up service, please contact them for more details.

PRE-TRIP ACCOMMODATION:

Please book this direct with the Envoy Hostel. Accommodation costs for any additional nights are payable direct to Envoy Hostel on arrival, in $ USD or GEL.

AIRPORT TRANSFERS:

Airport Transfer Costs: Approximately $20 USD

If you would like to arrange an airport transfer, please contact Envoy Hostel directly. On arrival into Tbilisi airport you will be met by a hotel representative who will take you to the group joining Hotel. The driver will have your name on a sign.

If you have chosen not to book a transfer with the Envoy Hostel, there are taxis and a shuttle bus running into town from straight outside the airport as you exit after arrivals. Not all taxi drivers will speak English, so it is advised to have the hostel address written down to advise them. Ensure they use the meter.

We recommend to change some currency into Georgian Lari (GEL) in the airport at a bureau de change or there are ATM's - hostel rates can be low.

PRE-DEPARTURE MEETING

There will be a pre-departure meeting in the starting hotel the night before the start of the trip, usually around 6:00pm. There will be a notice in reception advising the exact time and here your crew will explain how the day to day running of the trip works. Your Tour Leader will **collect your Local Payment** money as well as 2 photocopies of your **passport information page**, **insurance policy details** with policy number and confirmation that the duration will cover you for the entire trip and a **24-hour emergency assistance** telephone number.It is essential that you attend this meeting - please let the UK office or your tour leader know if you are unable to do so.

POST TRIP ACCOMMODATION AND AIRPORT TRANSFERS

Post-trip accommodation can be arranged with your Tour Leader during the trip or directly with the hotel on arrival. The return airport transfer can be arranged through your hotel / hostel and is not included, it is at your own expense. We regret these services cannot be arranged via the Oasis office before departure.

FLIGHT INFORMATION

Starting in Istanbul - If you plan to collect your Iranian visa in Istanbul, we recommend that you arrive at least five working days before your trip departure date and take in to account any days the embassy/consulate may be closed (holidays, weekends etc)**.**

Starting in Tbilisi, Bishkek or Dushanbe - Please note that our trip leaves the city on Day 1 - we recommend arriving a day or two earlier if you wish to make the most of the sights and attractions of the relevant city and surrounding areas.

Starting in Ashgabat - Because of restrictions on tourism in Turkmenistan, we advise arriving no earlier than the day before the trip begins. Please note that pre-trip accommodation in Ashgabat must be booked and paid to Oasis Overland before travelling.

Return flights must be booked for at least the day AFTER the trip is due to end, but flexible tickets are best in case of unforeseen delays. You may wish to allow some extra time to explore your departure cities.

There are many online flight search engines such as **www.skyscanner.net** or **www.ebookers.co.uk** **,** flights can also be booked direct with airline websites or through travel agencies. Please inform us of your flight details through your online account, as airport transfers can be arranged for various trips.

One way ticket - If you intend to travel on a one way ticket to meet up with one of our trips, without possessing an onward flight ticket - we recommend that you have a copy of your payment confirmation/receipt (that you will be sent at time of your balance payment) available at immigration to

assist easy entry.

Departure Taxes - Please check with your Travel Agent or Airline if your flight ticket already includes a departure tax payment out of the country. If it does not - please budget for approx US$30 to $70 USD - to be paid in US$ only.

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.

If you have dual nationality you can only use one passport for the entire trip. It is your responsibility to ensure you have all the relevant visas you require.

Please bring 2 photocopies of your passport details to give to your tour leader.

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 (Tajikistan and Indonesia both require 2 blank pages).

VISAS

The information below is to be used only as a guide and may change without prior notice. It is advisable to contact the relevant embassy in plenty of time before the trip departs to check the current visa requirements**.** It is **your responsibility** to ensure you have all the relevant visas you require**.**

IMPORTANT: **Once you have booked this trip, please contact the office for information on your Visa Document Pack.**

To acquire all the necessary visas before travelling it may be necessary to submit your passport to a number of different embassies at different times and the timings of supporting documents being processed can be unpredictable, so we recommend you remain in your home country for two months before starting your Oasis Overland trip. If you are travelling beforehand, please contact us.

Visas must be paid for in USD cash ONLY when obtained on the trip.

Most of the countries we travel through in Central Asia require a visa. Prior to departure you will be provided with full and comprehensive information that will guide you through the process and give you all the tools you need to help get your visas. Visas for trips in South East Asia can be obtained either en route or at the border.

All information given pertaining to visas is given in good faith and is accurate, to the best of our knowledge. The rules and timings for obtaining each visa can vary enormously from one embassy to the next, and the processes and requirements can and often do change overnight and without prior notice. Please allow time for unexpected delays and be regularly contactable in the months running up to your trip - we will need to be able to be in touch with you.

We will do everything we reasonably can, in liaison with our strong support network of local operators and agents, to help you get all your visas in time and with minimal inconvenience and cost. But please remember it is ultimately your own responsibility to check the visa requirements for your nationality with the relevant authorities and officials and to ensure you have all the necessary valid documents for your trip and we offer no guarantees that your applications will be successful; these decisions are ultimately in the hands of the officials in the various countries we visit. We have no influence over their decisions.

Country	British	Aust	NZ	S.African	USA	Canadian
Turkey	£15	£45	Free	£15	£15	£45
Azerbaijan	£20	£20	£20	£20	£20	£20
Georgia	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free
Armenia	Free	£5	£5	Free	Free	Free
Iran*	£155	£90	£105	£35	£55	£45
Turkmenistan**	£80	£80	£80	£80	£80	£80
Uzbekistan	Free	Free	Free	£40	$20	Free
Kazakhstan	Free	Free	Free	£35	Free	Free
Tajikistan***	£70	£70	£70	£70	£70	£70
Kyrgyzstan	Free	Free	Free	£40	Free	Free
China ******	£150	£150	£150	£150	£150	£150

* In addition to the Iran visa fee payable in the consulate/embassy when you collect the visa, you will need to obtain an initial visa authorisation first through our local Iranian partners. An additional fee of

around £20 will apply.

** A Letter of Invitation is required before your Turkmenistan visa can be obtained at the land border when you cross with the group. The cost of obtaining this is included in your trip price.

*** The Tajikistan visa process is notoriously fickle and not all applications are approved, for no seemingly apparent reason. We can offer an additional service through our local partners to help facilitate the process (for an additional fee of $25 or $75 depending on the amount of work required).

**** We will assist with all the information and documentation you will need to apply for your Chinese visa.

An informative and well-written independent guide to Central Asia visas can be found at **www.caravanistan.com.**

Armenia

Passport Holders from UK, Ireland, USA, Canada and most EU countries will not require a visa to enter Armenia.

Australia and New Zealand passport holders will require a visa to enter, this can be purchased at the border on arrival. Approximate cost is $7 USD.

Passport Holders from other countries, will need to check the current visa requirements with the relevant consulate, and whether you need to obtain the visa in advance.

Azerbaijan

All Passport Holders require an E-visa in advance. E-visa's can be applied for through the following link: **https://evisa.gov.az/en/.** Details for the visa application will be emailed to you a few months before your trip departs. Approximately £25.

Georgia

Passport Holders from UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada, South Africa and most EU countries will not require a visa to enter Georgia.

Passport Holders from other countries, will need to check the current visa requirements with the relevant consulate, and whether you need to obtain the visa in advance.

Iran

All nationalities must obtain an Iranian visa in advance, before joining the Oasis trip. You will need to

apply for an Authorisation Code before you can obtain a visa. This code can be arranged through a local operator or, Oasis Overland can assist you with this at an additional cost. Approximately £55 GBP per person.

Details for the visa process and application will be emailed to you a few months before your trip departs. Cost will depend on the embassy in which you apply for your visa, approximately £150 GBP for Australia, New Zealand and South Africa passport holders, £270 GBP for Canadian passport holders and £175 GBP for British passport holders, $70 USD for USA passport holders.

Kazakhstan

Passport holders from UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and most EU countries will not require a visa to enter Kyrgyzstan.

Passport holders from other countries, will need to check the current visa requirements with the relevant consulate, and whether you need to obtain the visa in advance.

Kyrgyzstan

Passport holders from UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and most EU countries will not require a visa to enter Kyrgyzstan.

Passport holders from other countries, will need to check the current visa requirements with the relevant consulate, and whether you need to obtain the visa in advance.

Tajikistan

UK passport holders require an E-visa in advance. E-visas can be applied for through the following link: www.evisa.tj. Details for the visa application will be emailed to you before your trip departs. A GBAO permit is also required if travelling in the High Pamirs. You will need 2 clear pages in your passport for this visa.

Turkmenistan

All nationalities must obtain a Letter of Invitation (LOI) in advance. You will need to apply for the LOI before you can obtain a visa for Turkmenistan. Once you have the LOI you will be able to apply for the visa at the border on arrival if you are travelling by land, or at the airport on arrival if you are flying into Ashgabat.

Oasis Overland will provide you with the LOI included in your trip price. The cost of the visa on arrival ranges from $55 to $115 USD and will vary depending on your nationality. Additionally, there is a Migration Tax of $14 USD and a mandatory Covid19 test costing $33 US, payable on arrival in Turkmenistan.

Details for the LOI process and visa application will be emailed to you a few months before your trip departs.

Uzbekistan

Passport holders from UK, Ireland, Australian, New Zealand, Canada and most EU countries can obtain a free visa into Uzbekistan at the border on arrival. American passport holders will need to apply for an e-visa before arrival into Uzbekistan. (Please note: those on the 40 day Silk Road Circuit will need to apply for a double entry e-visa)

Passport Holders from other countries, will need to check the current visa requirements with the relevant consulate, and whether you need to obtain the visa in advance.

VACCINATIONS AND HEALTH

It is possible that you may require some vaccinations for your trip, depending on the areas that you are visiting. As we are not medically trained, we are unable to give detailed advice on vaccination requirements, so please use the information below as a guide only. We have worked closely with **Nomad Travel Clinics** for many years and they offer Oasis travellers a **10% discount** on vaccinations, anti- malarial drugs, first aid items, clothing and equipment, just enter discount code OASIS1000 at **www.nomadtravel.co.uk**. Alternatively you can check out the **fit for travel website** for more travel health information or consult a reputable travel clinic or your GP for information and advice. We suggest that you allow at least 8 weeks to get all your vaccinations.

Covid-19 - 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 pre-entry PCR tests and avoid potential disruption to the itinerary. Should a country require negative PCR tests before entry for unvaccinated travellers then obtaining these will be at your cost should you need them. If a country will not admit unvaccinated travellers at all, then any travellers in the group affected would need to overfly that country at their own cost.
Remember to bring copies of your proof of vaccination with you.

Yellow Fever - Being vaccinated against Yellow Fever and having a valid certificate and a photocopy is deemed compulsory in many countries we visit, especially at certain borders and are needed if you are entering from an infected country. You can view a list of countries requiring a certificate through the World Health organisation **http://www.who.int/ith/ITH_country_list.pdf**

Rabies - Vaccinations are regularly recommended for some of the countries that we travel through - especially if time and money are not a deterrent.

Malaria - In some of the areas we visit there is a risk of contracting Malaria. You must be aware that whatever malaria prophylactics you are taking, they only offer partial protection. They must be coupled with your own physical efforts against being bitten - which is the best prevention. Malaria-carrying mosquitoes come out at sunset so from this time you should wear long sleeves and trousers. Exposed skin, especially ankles, should have insect repellent containing 'Deet' applied to them. Your crew will advise on where the worst affected areas are on the trip. There are a number of prophylactic malaria treatments on the market & requirements change. It is also wise to take a sample of whichever prophylactic you choose, a few weeks before you leave. This way you may determine early on if you have any adverse reactions so you can change the regimen if necessary. Please consult a reputable travel clinic or GP for advice. For more information visit **www.nomadtravel.co.uk** **or www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk**

Altitude sickness - This is caused by thin air (due to lack of oxygen) and can affect anyone arriving at high altitude (above 3000mtrs). The symptoms are headaches, dizziness, shortage of breath and possibly nausea. To avoid this or alleviate the symptoms make a point to acclimatize by arriving into a high altitude destination a few days early and make sure you do not over exert yourself, rest for a few hours, avoid drinking alcohol, smoking, large meals and drink plenty of water.

As we are travelling mostly by land (as opposed to flying into a high altitude location) we should acclimatise gradually, and so avoid 'soroche', mountain sickness.

Dengue - Unlike the malaria mosquito, which bites at night, the dengue carrying mosquito bites during the day. Some areas we travel to do have occasional outbreaks & it is therefore advised that you take care not to be bitten during the day as well as at night. There is no vaccine available.

Opiates and Prescription Medicines in Central Asia -Please note that all opiates and their derivatives are highly illegal in Central Asia, particularly Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Any products containing opiates, such as codeine or co-codamol are illegal and if you are found in possession of them you may be arrested as a drug-trafficker. Ensure that all personal medication is clearly labelled. If you are travelling with prescribed medicines you will need to have a copy of the signed doctor's prescription with you.

These rules can change without notice, so if you have any queries it is advisable to check travel advice provided by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which provides specific information for each country on the latest requirements.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

It is a compulsory requirement that you have adequate travel insurance before you join any Oasis trip and at the very least are insured for all necessary medical and repatriation costs incurred.

You will be asked to provide the following details if you have not already done so: travel insurance

company name, insurance policy number & insurance emergency telephone number. You will also be required to give a copy of your policy with this information to your Tour Leader on arrival with confirmation that the policy duration is sufficient to cover you for the entire duration of your trip. It is also wise to leave a copy of your insurance policy with a friend or relative for safe keeping.

We believe that your safety and holiday enjoyment are very important. It is a mistake to think that "it will never happen to me". It is also very important that you are covered for all the activities that you may wish to undertake while on our trip. It is extremely important that you check the full extent of your cover related to 24 hour Medical Emergency Assistance. In the event of you needing medical treatment you want to know that you have the best cover available to you. Your policy should include adequate Medical Emergency and Repatriation cover as well as Cancellation, Baggage and Personal Liability cover. You need to be aware of EXACTLY what activities your policy covers you for. Please note that skiing is not usually covered in most insurance policies. Please note also that many of the areas we visit are not as developed as the UK and we have no control over the availability or standard of medical and repatriation services and facilities in the areas we visit and these do not form any part of our contract with you.

You should also note that passenger liability insurance covering vehicles, particularly in Third World countries, may be unavailable or inadequate; it is therefore important that your insurance cover makes sufficient provision for you and your dependents in the event of an accident.

We are happy to refer our UK based travellers to the travel insurance specialists Campbell Irvine who have a policy suitable for overlanding which covers most of the adventure and sporting activities on our trips.

Please be aware that most travel insurance policies will not cover you if you are visiting areas against government travel advice. If your trip will go through areas like this (for example, some of our Trans Africa routes through West Africa) then you may need to look at an alternative policy for these sections, for example Battleface or SafetyWing.

For further information, check out the **Travel Insurance** section of our website.

IMPORTANT INSURANCE INFORMATION FOR THOSE VISITING ZANZIBAR:
The Zanzibar Government have announced the introduction of a travel insurance policy which will be obligatory for all foreign visitors to the islands, regardless of whether travellers have their own travel insurance in place.

1. The insurance policy is sold by Zanzibar Insurance Corporation.
2. The cost is US$44 per person.
3. The insurance requirement comes into force on 1st October 2024.
4. The policy must be purchased online at visitzanzibar.go.tz and purchases can be made from 1st September 2024.
5. Payment can be made online by debit or credit card.

6. On completion of the purchase, visitors will receive a QR code. The policy documents will be sent to your registered email address.
7. The policy document and QR code must be presented on in Zanzibar. Entry will be refused without this documentation.

To ensure you have a smooth entry, please ensure the above policy is purchased in advance of your arrival.

MONEY, BUDGETS AND LP

Local Payment (LP)

LP is part of your overall trip payment and is the most cost effective and practical way to get hard currency to the Middle East and Asia to pay for a variety of your day-to-day local costs (i.e. all meals prepared by the group, campsite fees, gas, and certain activities listed in the brochure) which cannot be pre-paid from the UK. It is a guaranteed amount, set before your trip departs, and unlike 'group kitty' systems we will not ask you to contribute more once the trip is underway.

Please note: Your LP is payable to your Tour Leader on the morning of departure 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 that they are post 2013 and do not have a serial number starting with CB**.**

How to bring your currency?

Past Oasis travellers have fed back that they have felt, as a general rule, it is best to bring your money in cash as a combination of Euros and US dollars. Euros are of course the best currency throughout Europe, Turkey, the Caucasus and Iran, and for all of Central Asia and China US dollars are favourable. Pre-paid travel currency cards are also an option if you are concerned about bringing all your money in cash but we advise bringing at least 50% of your money in cash. Some travellers worry about carrying so much cash with them, however all Oasis Overland trucks are equipped with an onboard safe for the security of your money and passport.

US dollars dated pre-2006 are not generally accepted so please ensure your notes are dated 2013 onward possible and are in a clean condition with no writing on the notes. Scottish pounds are usually not accepted.

Turkmenistan - is a largely cash-based economy; in all of the country there are very few ATMs, all in Ashgabat, and these are often out of service. Credit/debit cards and pre-paid currency cards are very difficult to use. Please budget for your time in Turkmenistan entirely in US dollars cash. It is possible to change money in hotels and at bureaux de change at a set exchange rate.

Spending Money

From past traveller feedback, US$150 to US$200 per week should cover costs such as meals out (on average 50% are supplied), soft drinks and beers, email and communications, souvenirs and other general spending. Personal spending habits and budgets differ greatly from person to person. Budget on optional activities and visa costs separately (see visa section above and optional excursions page) and allow extra for your Local Payment contribution.

Changing money

Change your money only at banks, hotels, airports or official exchange bureaus. It is illegal to change money on the street, as these people will normally be opportunistic thieves or undercover police.Your crew will advise you where and when you can change money & with what means. It is also a good idea to have a small CASH emergency fund, to allow for the unexpected.

Credit and Debit Cards

If using credit or debit cards (bear in mind these cannot be used in Turkmenistan) Visa is best; Mastercard and American Express have limited access through parts of Asia. Please note that usually you will be given local currency and NOT US$ or £GB. We recommend that you inform your bank that you will be using your card abroad to avoid it being blocked.

Pre-Paid Travel Currency Cards

These cards are similar to normal Credit and Debit cards but they can be pre loaded with cash before you travel with a set amount allowing you to withdraw this cash using the card at normal ATMs. It is a more secure way to access cash on your trip, but again do not rely on these as your sole means of funds on a trip - (please refer to the ATM section). Several banks and companies now offer these cards, but be sure to look into the rates for withdrawing cash when making your decision. Pre-paid cards that use Visa are preferable to Mastercard, which can be difficult to use.

ATMs

These are available in most major cities along our route and allow you to withdraw local currency only. We discourage you from relying on your ATM card as a primary source of funds in case it is lost/stolen/swallowed, or the machine isn't working. In some destinations we probably won't even see a bank or ATM for days on end. Even where do find them, they cannot always be relied upon - things change, and ATMs don't always work! Besides memorising your PIN, it is also important to be aware of your daily withdrawal limit and bank withdrawal costs.

Tipping

Is often expected and relied upon. It is often more than a reward for services well done, but, as

wages are extremely low, it is an accepted means of supplementing an income. If you would like to leave a tip for any activity/individual, you could organize this as a group and give a tip at the end. A recommended amount for restaurants is usually 10% of your total bill and similar for activities. Some countries also add an extra Government tax on restaurant bills.

Because it can be difficult to know what to tip, and because it has such importance in some areas both economically and culturally, there may be times and activities for which your crew will make it clear what level of tipping is 'customary/expected'. They may also be quite enthusiastic or assertive in encouraging you to take account of these suggestions. This is motivated by the knowledge of how important tipping can be, and the offence or confusion that can be caused when local people are tipped poorly. In the end, tipping remains at the discretion of the individual, but our crew will continue to advise on normal or average rates, and we would ask you to carefully consider the economic or personal impact of being seen as 'under tipping'. We know that many who travel with us are on a tight budget, but ask you to consider that those we work with locally may also face financial hardship, and also work very hard to try to give you unrivalled service/ experiences.

As a very rough guide, we would suggest that you budget for an amount equal to 10% of the local payment for your trip, plus 10% of the cost of any of the listed optional excursions that you wish to do. The amounts you end up tipping may vary from a rigid 10%, but hopefully this will help you budget in general.

In the past we have been asked by travellers about tipping your Oasis Crew. If you choose to do this, it would be budgeted separately from the above. Our guys work very hard at making your trip a great travel experience. Working overseas can often be challenging and they are pretty much on call for you 24 hours a day, so it's appreciated as a thank you for hard work and good service, but of course not mandatory. Our suggestion is to budget around US$1 a day.

CLIMATE

You will experience a variety of climates and weather conditions in Asia. At times it can be **very hot**, with temperatures reaching 40°C or higher in the deserts of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and China. On the other hand, it can get **very cold**, dropping to -5°C or lower in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan and Georgia. Though much of the trip will pass through dry areas where rainfall is rare, you will also travel in regions that can have rainfall year-round or at times even snow. So it is important to bring suitable clothing and camping equipment for all conditions. **View Central Asia Climate Chart**

The climate in South East Asia is tropical, with high temperatures and generally quite humid year-round with rainfall is common, especially in the afternoon. The rainy season lasts roughly from May to October, but even during this time of year the rains usually take the form of short, heavy showers.

WHAT TO TAKE

The less you take the less you have to pack, wash & lug home & you can always pick up extras along the way. Most people make the mistake of bringing too much gear. Clothes washing or laundry facilities will be available at least once a week. You will be travelling in the heat & camping in the cold, so bring clothes for all climates; rough stuff is best. Pack according to season: allowing for extremes in temperature (from the constant baking heat in the dry season to the cold and occasional frost overnight in some areas) Make sure that you bring your gear in a traditional soft sided 70 - 90L rucksack or holdall - suitcases are not suitable. **Remember baggage is limited to 20kg per person plus one day bag.**

Equipment	**Toiletries - Most available to buy on trip**
• **Sleeping Bag - 3 to 4 season bag, depending on season, & sleep sheet** • **Foam sleeping mat or thermarest & repair kit** • **Small day-pack or small bag to carry daily items** • **Soft rucksack or holdall (NOT rigid suitcase)** • **Water bottle - for personal use - we recommend Water-to-Go (see below Responsible Travel)**	• Soap, shampoo, toothbrush/paste, antibacterial hand wash, lip balm & moisturiser • Sun block 35 + after sun, hat & sun glasses • Tampons (can buy in most places) • Contraception
Clothes	**Personal Effects**
• **One pair of trainers or boots** • **Sandals/flip flops/jandals/thongs** • **Underwear/socks** • **T shirts/shirts** • **Shorts/swimwear** • **Jeans/trousers/jog pants/leggings** • **Skirt or dress** • **Sweat shirt/jumper** • **Jacket/fleece & waterproof jacket**	• Camera with protective case, spare batteries, film/memory card • Torch & spare batteries (head torch is best) • Travel adaptor plug/charger (for cameras & mobile phone batteries) • Money belt • Personal stereo - there is a stereo on the truck with iPod/MP3 adaptors • Towel &/or sarong

What to wear - Keeping your arms, shoulders and legs covered will go a long way to prevent causing offence and hassle to yourself. This is true for men as well as women (especially in predominantly Muslim countries). Avoid wearing tight or revealing clothing, but generally on some beaches you can wear what you like. Attitudes range from fairly liberal in such places as the Mediterranean coast, to extremely conservative in some of the small towns elsewhere.

Kyrgyzstan - if your trip goes to Kyrgyzstan bear in mind that we mostly camp at high altitude and you can expect it to get very cold! Please bring warm clothing and a suitable sleeping bag for temperatures that may at times reach below freezing.

Recommended Medical Kit List

• **Antiseptic ointment/Antihistamine cream & tablets** • **Nurofen or equivalent pain-killer** • **Eye-drops/bath** • **Anti-diarrhoea treatment** • **A couple of bandages (elasticated & triangular)** • **Medication for personal allergies/asthma etc** • **Insect repellent containing Deet**	• Re-hydration sachets/vitamin tablets • Assorted plasters • 1 Course of malaria treatment • Some suitable antibiotics as recommended by your doctor for infected cuts or to treat severe dysentery • Malaria Tablets - see Vaccinations & Health section

Even though our trucks are equipped with a comprehensive medical kit, we advise you to bring a small personal medical kit as our truck kit is not for general everyday use. It will also be your responsibility to carry your kit on included excursions and optional activities as some local operators may not have medical kits to hand.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT

Cameras (incl. Digital & Video Cameras) - An easy to use 'point and shoot' will get you some good photos. For memorable shots, it may be worthwhile investing in an SLR camera, but be sure to get some practice in before the trip! Most towns and cities have internet cafes where you can download onto CD/internet sites - but don't rely on it. Internet speeds can be slow for uploading photos to social media or the Cloud.

Photography - Be aware of your surroundings when taking photographs and filming. Some locations will be sensitive or have local laws banning photography. For example it is usually forbidden to use cameras at borders or around government buildings, military installations, bridges and airports or to take photos of local officials. If you do take photos or film where it is not permitted you may find yourself being questioned by irate officials who may decide to confiscate your camera or instruct you to delete all the images/footage on your device. If in doubt ask for permission, or if there is no-one to ask use some common sense.

Drones - As the use of drones becomes more common, countries throughout the world are gradually updating their laws and restrictions on usage. The specific regulations will vary from one country to another, so do check the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice for the latest information. As with cameras, use your common sense if you do use a drone and avoid operation in sensitive areas. If you plan to bring a drone on your trip with us please contact us first to ensure there will be a suitable place to store it while on your trip.

Electrical charging & power supply - It may be difficult to find a power source for charging at times, so a spare battery is a must.

Consider a 12V in-car charger (our vehicles are equipped with a couple of 12 volt cigarette lighter charger sockets - truck trips only) or bring along your 230V mains charger and travel adaptor plug for use at some of the hotels, hostels and campsites we stay at.

NOTE: 12V - 230V inverters cannot be used on our vehicles because of the power drain they cause.

Log onto**www.whatplug.net**for information regarding the different electrical plugs and voltage used in each country.

CONTACTING HOME

The internet and WiFi are available in many towns / cities you will visit. Do bear in mind that the connections can be unreliable and will not always be as fast as you are used to at home. If a lot of people try to use the internet at the same time the speed will be slower still, especially if trying to make Skype calls or upload photos / videos. During periods of the trip where we are wild camping, internet will be less common.

Some travellers choose to take an unlocked mobile phone with them and buy local SIM cards in each country, allowing them to use mobile data. If you particularly want or need regular internet access this may be a good option. Telephone calls can be expensive usually £1 to £5 for a three minute call.

Online Diaries - A great variety of free "travel blogs" are now available online, they are a good way of keeping relatives and friend up to date with what you are doing and a good place to upload photos, collecting messages as well as keeping a record for yourself.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Before you go

- Remove unnecessary packaging before you go - waste disposal facilities are often stretched or non existent in the places we visit. To avoid unnecessary pollution of local water supplies take environmentally friendly toiletries with you.
- Why not invest in a wind-up or solar-powered torch or media player before you travel or at least rechargeable batteries.
- Learn some of the local language and read up on the local history/culture before you go. You'll get so much more out of your trip.
- Why not pack some pens/pencils exercise books in your rucksack and they can be donated to a local school or project while you're away. You can also purchase these items cheaply, locally which will help local businesses.
- Take a sturdy water bottle with you from home that you can re-use throughout your trip. We carry large quantities of purified water with us on our Expedition vehicles and it is much better for the environment if you drink this, rather than purchase bottled water along the way. (It also saves you money).

- Water-to-Go: Oasis Overland have partnered with Water-to-Go to help reduce the number of plastic water bottles consumed during a trip. Water-to-Go is a filtration system that eliminates over 99.9% of all microbiological contaminants including viruses, bacteria, chemicals and heavy metals from any non-salt water source. Click here and enter the code OASIS15 to purchase your **Water-to-Go** products at 15% discount. Water-to-Go will then donate a further 15% to Oasis Overland Charity projects.

While you're travelling

From experience gained in running trips, we have developed our own practical and manageable environmental policy which all of our crew practice on the trips we operate, and they will share this information with you at the start of your trip. We welcome your input on this, plus any new ideas you may have, to improve our existing procedures. As a guide here's a few tips to bear in mind.

- Don't waste water. It is a scarce resource in many of the places our trips visit. On all our Ultimate and Overland Expeditions we carry large quantities of purified water with us. We encourage you to refill your own water bottles from this supply, rather than purchase bottled water along the way- much more environmentally friendly and saves you money.
- Never buy endangered species or endangered habitat products. Apart from the fact of it being illegal it also encourages the trade to continue.
- Look after and preserve the areas we visit. Be careful about stepping on coral reefs or trekking on undesignated tracks.
- Buy locally made crafts and products helping to support the local economy.
- Don't feel when bargaining that you have to get the cheapest price possible just for the sake of it. Pay what the item is worth to you & don't worry about what someone else has paid.
- Try the local food and drinks - this will help to support local farmers and food sellers. Sitting in a local cafe is also a great way to meet local people.
- Dispose of litter appropriately on your trip. This includes cigarette butts. Not only does litter look unsightly it can be lethal to wildlife.
- Where any toilet facilities exist, however unsavoury they might seem to you, they should be used. Where they do not, always bury your waste and make sure it is never near (at least 30m) a water source.
- When game viewing do not encourage your guides to get too close to the wildlife so that their natural behaviour is impeded.
- Respect local customs, traditions and beliefs of the people in the different regions that you travel through.
- Do not take photos of people, ritual events or special places unless you have asked first. Dress appropriately according to local codes and show respect around religious festivals.

- Recycling is almost non-existent in many of the areas and countries we visit - we do the best we can with limited resources & space on our vehicles.
- For books dedicated to travelling more responsibly & ethically see: **www.tourismconcern.org.uk**

Community Projects - Oasis are active in raising awareness and providing support to a number of projects and local schools where we believe we can make a positive difference. More information on the **projects we support**.

SECURITY

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) offer country-specific advice, regarding not only security but also entry regulations, local laws and customs and health. We strongly recommend all travellers visit the FCO website, or the equivalent in their home country, to familiarise themselves with local conditions and issues in the countries they plan to visit before committing to a trip with us. You can view their website here.

If you have any questions at all about the safety or security of your trip, please do not hesitate to contact us and we will be happy to discuss your trip in more detail.

In cities - All major cities have their share of petty crime (just like our cities) and sensible precautions need to be taken. Wearing expensive looking jewellery or watches and carrying cameras will draw unnecessary attention to you. Leave valuables such as passports and excess money in your hotel safe or truck safe (we recommend carrying a copy of your passport details page at all times). You may find a simple money belt is more discreet than a bag. Always be aware of your surroundings and when approached by people you do not know, use your common sense. At night in cities it's best to use a taxi, rather than walking around the streets, single women in particular need to be careful and we would suggest that it is safer to be in a group.

On board the truck - Each vehicle is fitted with a hidden, lockable safe to be used for money, passports and important documents. Group members will be responsible for the safe and Oasis Overland cannot accept any liability for clients' personal or monetary contents kept in the safe or on board the truck. We advise you to not take items of value that are not essential for the journey. In certain areas a roster may be drawn up for the group to share the task of guarding and keeping the vehicle secure.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

It is a compulsory requirement that you have adequate travel insurance before you join any Oasis Trip, and at the very least are insured for all necessary medical & repatriation costs incurred if you need them.

You will be asked to provide the following details on the Traveller Information Form that you send in to us after making your booking. If you have not already done so: travel insurance name, insurance policy number & insurance emergency telephone number. You will also be required to give a copy of your policy with this information to your Tour Leader on arrival with confirmation that the policy duration is sufficient to cover you for the entire duration of your trip. It is also wise to leave a copy of your insurance policy with a friend or relative for safe keeping.

We believe that your safety and holiday enjoyment are very important. It is a mistake to think that "it will never happen to me". It is also very important that you are covered for all the activities that you may wish to undertake while on our trip. It is extremely important that you check the full extent of your cover related to 24 hour Medical Emergency Assistance. In the event of you needing medical treatment you want to know that you have the best cover available to you. Your policy should include adequate Medical Emergency and Repatriation cover as well as Cancellation, Baggage and Personal Liability cover. You need to be aware of EXACTLY what activities your policy covers you for. Please note that skiing is not usually covered in most insurance policies.

We offer tailor made Overland Adventure Travel Insurance that covers most of the adventure and sporting activities on our trips.

For further information on the insurance we offer, the activities covered and costs, check out the **Travel Insurance** section of our website. UK residents can purchase the insurance we recommend directly through Campbell Irvine.

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POST TRIP ACCOMMODATION AND AIRPORT TRANSFERS

Post-trip accommodation can be arranged with your tour leader during the trip or directly with the hotel on arrival. The return airport transfer can be arranged through your hotel / hostel and is not included, it is at your own expense. We regret these services cannot be arranged via the Oasis office before departure.

WHAT TO EXPECT

LIFE ON THE ROAD

Expedition Travel

Firstly expect the unexpected! If you are looking for a set itinerary where everything runs smoothly, then this is not the kind of trip for you. Our itineraries can change due to local circumstances, and in such situations we will always try to minimise any disruption, but bear in mind that from time to time events happen outside our control. It is this very unpredictability which makes each expedition different, exciting and one of the most adventurous things that you will possibly ever do! As part of this adventure you will be expected to have an active involvement in the day to day running of the trip, be part of the group and get stuck in and help with various tasks, whether it's cooking meals over open fires, pitching your tent or keeping the truck clean and tidy.

Expedition Vehicle

The Oasis expedition truck will be your new home giving you a comfortable & secure base with which to experience your trip. We use a purpose built truck which has been converted especially for this expedition, which passes through all types of terrains from soft sand, mud, rock and potholed roads to tarseal. It is reassuring to know that these vehicles can handle the tough conditions that they are put through. The truck is equipped with all of the equipment we may need en-route, including a professionally compiled expedition Medical Kit, large water & fuel carrying capacities, an extensive range of spare parts as well as the kitchen sink, (well almost!) so all you need is your sleeping bag, a roll mat and your own personal gear!

Seatbelts

All Oasis Overland trucks are fitted with seatbelts. For your own safety and security we recommend that travellers wear these at all times whilst the vehicle is moving. Most of our overland trucks also have a ‘beach area’ which is a chill out zone to be used when the truck is not moving.

Accommodation

Accommodation is split throughout this trip between simple hotels and hostels and camping. The variety of accommodation provided is great and often a totally unique experience, including bush camps with no facilities, yurts and simple village pensions. Some are well managed and some very basic. Oasis uses roomy three-person tents but only for two people. They are specially made for us to meet the tougher conditions of an expedition trip and have mosquito netting sewn into the door and

windows. It would also be a good idea to bring your own freestanding mosquito net so as to give you the freedom of sleeping under the stars at night. At bush camps you will be living off the truck, so there will be no showers or en-suite facilities, so digging your own toilet pit with the shovels supplied is essential!

During the day

As a guide driving days normally start at about 8am and finish at about 5pm, with stops for lunch and buying food, seeing local sights etc. We won't be driving every day, although there are times when we will drive for more than one day, and very occasionally a few long drives of about 4 to 5 days. We will then stop for a few days and you will have free time to explore, meet local people, do some optional activities or just relax and do your own thing. Expect to sometimes get dusty & dishevelled during the day and although you will be able to shower most nights (except at bush camps), not all camps will have hot showers.

Meals & cook groups

When 'on the road' with the expedition vehicle or camping, we usually cook using gas or over open fires in a rota system and you can expect to cook in a group of two or three people approximately once every ten days depending on the number of people on trip and whereabouts you are. Your cook group will have to decide on what to cook, utilise stocks from the truck stores and locally obtain ingredients from markets, shops etc and rustle up a meal. But don't worry if you're not a Gordon Ramsay as the rest of the group and the Tour Leader usually lend a helping hand. Here is an idea of what to expect at meal times:

Breakfasts - Usually simple - we help ourselves to cereal, toast, hot drinks and on occasion we will splurge with a cooked breakfast.

Lunch - Cold and usually quick. The cook group will put out bread, tinned supplies and maybe make a salad.

Dinner - Cooks come into their own in the evening and will always attempt to cook up some delights. When the truck is parked up for a few days in a town or city most people usually like the option to eat out at local restaurants - so we often don't cook all meals when at these locations. Meals whilst staying in Hotels/Hostels/Pensions are not included in the local payment price.

Vegetarian/Vegan/Celiac /Gluten & Lactose intolerance - Our Tour Leaders will always do their best to cater for any dietary requirement or intolerance whenever possible. However we do not cater for fussy eaters. It must be remembered that the variety of dishes available may not be the same as available to meat eaters. If there is anything in particular you require in your diet or because of an allergy 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.

Remember that when eating out in local restaurants & hotels that the vegetarianism or food allergies / intolerances, is still not widely known about or understood by many local people. i.e Vegetarians or

Vegans will often be offered 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. Travellers with food allergies or specific dietary requirements may find it useful to bring with them some notes in the local language, explaining their needs which they can then show to the restaurant staff. These can be bought online or simply use Google Translate and print one off!

In the evenings

When at a bushcamp or campsite where you and your tent buddy will put up the tent, and then lend a hand with getting out the tables, stools, firewood and water containers. The fire grates need to be taken out, the fire lit and someone can fill the kettle and make hot drinks while the cook group prepares the evening meal. Then just sit back & chill and enjoy the rest of your evening!

Oasis Crew

We usually have two crew whose duties are extensive and quite demanding, with challenges ranging from driving in difficult terrains and conditions, maintaining the expedition vehicle to a very high standard, to organising visas and border crossings, arranging accommodation, pre-booking some excursions and guides, helping with shopping and cooking as well as finding the best deals, socializing and making sure everything runs as smoothly as possible. While our crew are usually experienced and knowledgeable of the countries through which we travel, they are not tour, nature or wildlife guides as such, but they will be more than willing to pass on any interesting and useful information that they have acquired whilst on the road. An equally rewarding way to gain a better insight into the wildlife, cultural and historical diversity of the countries we travel through, is by talking to the local people and using local guides.

Itinerary

Because Oasis Overland do not operate normal 'package holidays' the itineraries given cannot be guaranteed to run exactly as outlined. However, it is rare that we have to make major changes and in the event that we do this will be discussed with you either before or during the trip. It is important to bear in mind that should it not be possible to enter a certain country due to safety concerns, visa problems or political turmoil etc, and it becomes necessary to fly over a country in order to continue a trip, that all costs for flights will be borne by you and not Oasis. Should it not be possible for an Oasis trip to begin from a scheduled starting city due to border closures, civil unrest etc, Oasis will make all reasonable efforts to begin the trip from an alternative location. However, all additional costs that you may incur in travelling to the alternative location will be paid by you or your insurance company and not Oasis.

TRIP ITINERARY

Tbilisi

The Old Town of Tbilisi has much to offer. Here you can take a stroll along narrow cobbled streets, past traditional old houses with carved wooden balconies, relax in the warm waters of the **historic sulphur baths** and visit some of the city's key historical sites; Metekhi Church, Narikala Fortress, Sioni Cathedral and Anchiskhati Church. If we need to obtain Iran visas, we may pick them up here too.

Tbilisi to Yerevan

Upon leaving Tbilisi our next stop is **Telavi,** the principal town of the **Kakheti** region, famous for its **vineyards and wineries**. Wine has been produced in Georgia since 4000BC and the industry has played a small but significant role in the country's history ever since, as winemaking (and its consumption) has enjoyed an important role in Georgian culture and society. Here we have the option of taking a **wine tour** to find out more about the history of the area, why wine production has been so important, and of course to try some ourselves!

Telavi itself is a fascinating and relaxing place to spend a couple of nights with many good restaurants and cafes, and not far from the town there are other sites well worth a visit, such as the **monastery of Akhali Shuamta**, and the small village of **Ikalta** and its **Church of the Transfiguration** which dates from the 8th Century BC.

After departing Telavi we cross the border to Armenia and carry on to the ancient town of **Dilijan**, famous for its hiking, food and arts. We should have time for a day hike here before will head to high altitude **Lake Sevan** with the possibility to visit the **Hayravank Monastery** that overlooks the lake.

Leaving the Lake Sevan area, we make our way via the Geghard Monastery and Garni Temple to one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world that is **Yerevan** where we will be based for the next couple of days and where there is plenty to see and do.

Yerevan to Iran or Azerbaijan

From Yerevan we head south to Tatev, which at 5.7km long, hosts the longest cable tramway in the world; the "Wings of Tatev", that whisks you up into the mountains where there are lots of additional activities to take part in.

Important Note: From Tatev, our journey will either head north, towards the border into Azerbaijan. Or, head south to the border with Iran. Both routes come together again in Ashgabat in Turkmenistan. Which we take will depend on the current situation with regard to border closures, Caspian Sea ferry operations, and regional security issues. We will make a final decision on which route we will take a couple of months before each trip departs.

Iran – Tabriz to Esfahan OR Azerbaijan - Sheki to Baku

Iran route: After crossing into in Iran our first stop will be in **Tabriz**, where we can explore its impressive Grand Bazaar. We'll then continue east towards the capital **Tehran**. This is a friendly city, and we can visit the Golestan Palace, several excellent museums, and in the evening perhaps take a walk up from Darband where there are many restaurants and cafes either side of the river which forms the start of the hiking trail up to Mount Tochal.
From Iran we head south towards **Kashan**, famous for Persian ceramics, and woollen & silk carpets. Then we arrive in **Esfahan**, for many the highlight of their travels through Iran. Exploring the huge main square, bazaars, beautifully mosaiced mosques, and the famous bridges will take up a couple of days here.

Azerbaijan route: On arrival in Azerbaijan we get to visit the 18th Century **UNESCO town of Sheki** and continue on to the picturesque ancient village of **Lahich** with its copper beaters and ancient crafts. Heading south we visit the **mud volcanoes of Qobustan** before arriving in the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku. **Baku** has an amazing blend of the old city and the ultra-modern and is fascinating to explore.
Leaving Baku we head to the ferry port for our crossing of the Caspian Sea to Turkmenistan. Ferry schedules are notoriously unreliable and unpredictable and we may need to wait for a day or two (or more) for the next ferry to fill up and depart. The crossing takes approximately 18 hours.

Continue to Ashgabat

Iran route: We will leave Esfahan and head East towards Mashhad. Our route is flexible, and may include stops to explore the **Morteza Ali Canyon**, and the old adobe village of **Esfahak**, destroyed by the big earthquake in 1978. In Mashhad, the holiest city in Iran, we can see the **Imam Reza Shrine**, where the eighth Shia Imam, Ali al-Rida is buried. From Mashhad we head north and cross into Turkmenistan and drive straight to the capital, Ashgabat.

Azerbaijan route: After crossing the Caspian Sea we arrive in our next country, **Turkmenistan**. On arrival in Turkmenbashi, we will spend the night in town and do some shopping before setting off on the truck for our **desert adventure**. Our first stop will be at the colourful and spectacular 'fiery fortress' of **Yangikala Canyon,** whose massive limestone cliffs have striking red and pink bands. We'll camp at a pilgrim house close to the Gozli Ata mausoleum, one of the holiest sites in Turkmenistan. The next day we'll drive through the desert past the towering **Balkan Mountains** and bush camp in the desert. Our journey then continues to the fascinating village of **Nokhur** in the foothills of the Kopet Dag mountains to see a unique tribal cemetery, sacred Oriental plane tree (Chinar) and the Kyz Bibi cave. We'll camp near a local village, and then finally make our way to the 'white marble city' of Ashgabat, stopping for a potential swim at the **Kow Ata underground lake** on the way. Finally we'll arrive at our hotel for a well-earned rest and modern comforts!

Ashgabat

We have some free time and enjoy a city tour of **Ashgabat**. Turkmenistan's capital, founded in the 1880s by the Russian Tsarist government, sits between the foothills of the Koptedag mountains to the south, and the vast Karakum Desert to the north. The city was almost entirely destroyed following an earthquake in 1948 and rebuilt in the Soviet style. Following independence in 1991 the city has been transformed into a futuristic, and in many ways bizarre collection of unique structures and wide streets lined with white marble. All cars must by law also be white, and for many travellers, Ashgabat is one of the most mystifying and unusual cities they will ever experience.

On the city tour we visit **Independence Park**, the **Ertogrul Gazi Mozque**, the Arch of Neutrality, the **Turkmenbashi Mosque Mauasoleum** and many other sites throughout the city. There are plenty of fantastic photo opportunities, and we will have the chance to explore some of the markets and meet the locals.

Ashgabat to Kunye Urgench

From Ashgabat there is a long desert crossing as we drive north through the harsh **Kara-Kum Desert**, a sparsely-populated and remote expanse. We veer off the highway and do some off-roading as we cross the dunes to the **Darwaza Gas Crater**. Also known as the 'Door to Hell' or 'Gates of Hell', this remarkable sight is the result of a Soviet-era gas exploration accident, when the ground beneath a drilling rig gave way and to prevent poisonous gas leaking out it was decided to burn it off. Originally engineers believed it would all be burned in a few days, but that was in 1971 and the field is still burning to this day. The result is a sight quite like no other as we are able to peer down into the crater and see the fire, and feel the intense heat coming from the flames. Conditions permitting we will get to the crater in the truck and bush camp nearby in the remote desert.

Rising early the next morning we leave Darwaza and return to the highway as we continue north to **Kunye Urgench**, an ancient Silk Road town that was abandoned in the early 1700s and has been left largely untouched since. The old ruins of the town are a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the most striking sight is undoubtedly the **60-metre high minaret**, that dates from the 11th Century. It is said that when **Genghis Khan's** Mongol army invaded this area that the infamous warlord was so impressed by the minaret he ordered for it to not be destroyed!

Kunye Urgench to Bukhara

We cross the border to **Uzbekistan.** Road conditions permitting, we will drive to the edge of where the **Aral Sea** used to lie. In the 1960s the Soviet Union began an intense irrigation project to boost cotton growth in the region using the then vast sea as its source. The project has led to the sea now shrinking to just 10% of its original size and today as we reach where its edge formerly was, we can see ships sitting incongruously in the middle of what is now a huge desert where we camp for the night.

Continuing further into Uzbekistan, we find well preserved relics from the time when Asia was a centre of empire, learning, and trade along the famous Silk Road. Some of its cities have abundant

old architecture, mosques and minarets cloaked with the mystery of the orient dating back thousands of years.

Our first city stop is in **Khiva**, one of the most noteworthy of the cities and towns of Central Asia. It is a unique monument town, completely preserved in the cultural style of the region, and is a World Heritage Site for its historical significance. It has more minarets than any other place in Asia, and the **Juma Mosque**, which has an amazing 218 ornate carved wooden columns, is another of the main attractions. We will spend at least a couple of nights here to explore the ancient madrassas, medinas, mausoleums and museums and soak up the unique atmosphere.

Continuing south, we bush camp out in the desert before reaching another town with much historical influence that was also on the great Silk Road**.**

Bukhara to Samarkand

The name **Bukhara** is synonymous with the Silk Road, and its name conjures up images of Marco Polo, trading caravans and exploration. The British explorer Alexander Burnes, one of the iconic figures of the Victorian-era ‘Great Game’ was nicknamed ‘Burnes of Bukhara’.

The city is situated on a sacred hill and was founded in the 13th century BC; a centre of learning throughout much of its history, it is home to over 350 mosques and some 100 Islamic colleges. It is an attractive city with narrow streets, green parks and gardens that are a pleasure to wander around and there will be the opportunity for a bout of good-humoured haggling in the bazaar.

The **Kyzylkum Desert** is about 300,000 sq km and lies between the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya rivers. This is a vast arid plain with a number of isolated bare mountains rising to 900 metres and we journey across it on our way to **Samarkand.** Scheduled permitting, we may opt to take one of Uzbekistan’s famous bullet trains, and rejoin the truck on arrival.

Samarkand itself is the second largest city in Uzbekistan. It dates back 2,500 years, making it as old as Babylon or Rome. Here we have a couple of days to explore the splendid architecture such as the 15th century **Bibi-Khanum Mosque** which when it was built was considered to have the largest dome in the Muslim world. Today it stands next a noisy and colourful Oriental market. No trip here is complete without a wander around the three edifices of the **Registan**, once Medieval Samarkand's commercial plaza and today quite possibly the most awesome sight in Central Asia.

Samarkand to the Fann Mountains and Dushanbe

From Samarkand we head east and cross the border into Tajikistan before climbing up into the **Fann Mountains**, one of Tajikistan's great ranges (the other being the Pamirs). Peaks of over 5000 mtrs tower above as we head to **Iskanderkul Lake** at 2200 mtrs. It is said to be the resting place of Alexander the Greats horse, Bucephalus. The glacial lake is a stunning spot for a hike and we aim to visit **Tajikistan's highest waterfall** (40 mtrs). We will also have more time for hikes in the Fann Mountains before descending to Dushanbe.

Dushanbe is Tajikistan's largest city, and aptly its name means "Money" in Tajik language. It's a big showy entry to the country, in stark contrast to the East. You'll pass a lovely day strolling through parks, admiring the fountains and the wide boulevards punctuated with grand buildings. Visit "Flag Pole Park" or the bazaar, or make the most of being in a city with restaurants specialising in various different cuisines**.**

Dushanbe to the Pamir Highway and Osh

The next 8 days or so are spent on a spectacular (and slow at times) drive through the mountains, following one of the world's most famous and scenic roads, the **Pamir Highway**. After obtaining any permissions we need in Dushanbe, we start by heading south through lowland hills and pastures to the Nurek Dam and on to Kulob. We then cross the **Shurobod Pass** before arriving at Kalai Khumb. There are great mountain views from the Karon archaeological site here, and the Afghanistan border is just a few hundred metres away across the Panj River. We follow the river, and the border, for some time before reaching Khorog, the capital of the mountainous Badakshan region. We can visit the bazaar and botanical gardens here.

From Khorog we head east again, climbing significantly now, to Murghab, an important Soviet military station in years gone by but now mainly home to Kyrgyz inhabitants. There is a market here and yak-wool handicrafts are available. The highest point of the Pamir Highway comes next, as we cross the Akbaital Pass at 4,655m on our way to Karakul Lake. The heat around Dushanbe is in the distant past now, and these are a cold and remote few days. The air is noticeably thinner, but we have ascended gradually to take account of the altitude gain. We'll cross the border into Kyrgyzstan next and descend to our next bush camp near Sary Moghul. We should have time for more hikes here or a drive up to see some more mountain lakes. Then it is time to descend out of the mountains to Osh.

Osh to Bishkek

Osh is Kyrgyzstan's second biggest and the country's oldest, city. Make sure you visit the bazaar, which has occupied the same spot for over 2000 years and used to be a major stop along the ancient Silk Road. After some time relaxing here after our mountain drive, we drive north through more beautiful mountain scenery and past the turquoise waters of Toktogul Reservoir, before arriving in the capital city of **Bishkek**.

Bishkek to Almaty and the Charyn Canyon

We leave Bishkek and head north east to Almaty, **Kazakhstan's largest metropolis** and capital until 1997. Almaty is the largest and most ethnically and culturally diverse city in Kazakhstan. Set in the foothills of the **Trans Lli Alatau mountains**, the area has a ski resort (Shymbulak) at an elevation of 2,200 mtrs and enjoys a great amount of snow from November through to May. The city has many sights and attractions, including **Ascension Cathedral in Panfilov Park**; Abay Opera House; Golden Warrior Monument in the Republic Square and the giant **Almaty Tower**. Or for adrenaline lovers, why not ride the **'Fast Coaster'** roller coaster, that is located on the side of a mountain and reaches

speeds of 45 km per hour.

We continue east looking for amazing camping areas to explore and if time allows we may visit the Singing Dunes. We'll also drive up to **Kolsai Lake**, from where you can hike further into the hills to Lake Kaindy. Our next stop is at **Charyn Canyon**, which is considered the Grand Canyon of Kazakhstan with its towering cliffs, eroded sedimentary rocks and some excellent hiking trails.

Charyn Canyon to Lake Issyk Kul

We leave the Charyn Canyon today and cross back into Kygyzstan before descending into the area of **Lake Issyk-Kul**, a mountain lake in the northern **Tien Shan Mountains**, once used by the Soviets to test their submarine torpedoes!

The area in the hills around the lake at **Altyn Arashan** and its surrounds offer the outdoor lover many hiking and horse riding opportunities and we spend a few days here to take in the amazing scenery. We will stay in traditional yurts here.

We then visit the vast red stone cliffs in **Jeti-Oguz** and visit the town of **Karakol** with its attractive houses and tree-lined streets. Behind it are the **Terskay Ala-Too Mountains**, an unspoilt wilderness populated only by nomadic shepherds.

Continuing around the lake we stop to see the amazing rock formations and cliffs at **Fairy Canyon** before arriving at the town of Kochkor.

As we travel around Kyrgyzstan we camp, but we also may have the opportunity to use some family homestays, where we are welcomed into a local home for the night. These are subject to availability, but if we can arrange them they offer a fantastic experience, allowing us to feel part of the family for a night and make some new friends! We will also include at least one overnight stay in traditional yurts.

Lake Song Kul and back to Bishkek

Travelling south west and leaving behind Lake Issyk-Kul, we make our way to the isolated and breathtaking **Lake Song Kol**, where we stay in traditional felt **Yurts**. There will be opportunity to either hike or horse back ride and explore the surrounding area. If we are lucky we may even see a game of **Ulak Tartysh** - a Kyrgyz version of polo. We will also view a traditional eagle hunting display (now done without live prey).

Here, those travellers continuing on to China will leave us, while we head back Bishkek with a stop at the impressive **Burana Tower** on the way.

Bishkek

Your trip ends after breakfast. Bishkek is a well-connected city, with the airport serving destinations throughout Asia with connections for onward travel further afield. For those with some time to spare it's a pleasant city to spend a few days at the end of your trip, with some excellent bars, cafés and

restaurants dotted around to relax and reflect on your trip through Central Asia.

Bishkek

Kyrgyzstan's leafy, relaxed capital is a largely Soviet-built city, softened somewhat by its many boulevards and tree lined streets. We take a day here in a comfortable, friendly hostel to recharge our batteries. We can enjoy the cafés and restaurants dotted around the city, there is no shortage of bars and nightclubs, and for those so inclined there are also a few cinemas and shopping districts.

Bishkek is also home to a number of museums, including the **Kyrgyz State Historical Museum** and **Zoological Museum,** which have exhibits that explain more about Kyrgyzstan political and natural history, and there are a number of parks and other public areas worth visiting to watch local life pass you by, the main one being **Ala-Too Square**, which once was dominated by a large statue of **Lenin** (this has now been moved to a smaller square in the city

OPTIONAL EXCURSIONS

Optional Excursions are paid for on the day and organised during your trip, so you can decide whilst travelling which activity you may want to do. Prices listed are only a guide and may be dependant on fluctuating exchange rates and minimum numbers. Please see below for more details.

GEORGIA

Title	From Price
Wine Tour Telavi	US$30
Cathedral, Museum and Sulphur Bath entrances, from	US$5
Stalin Museum Entry and Guided Tour Gori	US$6
Vardzia Museum	US$1

TURKMENISTAN

Title	From Price
Arch of Neutrality, Ashgabat	US$1.5
National Museum, Ashgabat	US$11
Carpet Museum, Ashgabat	US$9

KYRGYZSTAN

Title	From Price
Ulak Tartysh (Kyrgyz Polo) Per Person, Number Dependant	US$20
Museum Entrances, from	US$2

Title	From Price
Horse Riding Lake Song Kol, per day	US$15

UZBEKISTAN

Title	From Price
The Registan, Samarkand	US$15
The Ark, Bukhara	US$2.5
Khiva Tourist Ticket to Various Sites	US$12
Kalon Minaret, Bukhara	US$3

We feel that having optional excursions gives a greater degree of flexibility and independence to our group members; independence to decide how much your spending budget can afford; flexibility to decide when and what time of day or with whom to visit a particular site, rather than for example, with the whole group at a pre-ordained time.

You pay for the optional excursions to the local operator, ensuring the money stays with that operator in the local community and this ensures as well, that you are paying the true price for any optional excursions you want to do. This also applies to accommodation costs before and after the trip. Please note that the prices of optional excursions quoted are approximate as local prices can and do change. Please see the relevant trip page for the Optional excursions you can do on that trip and a list of prices.

Notes downloaded on: *11-11-2026*