Andean & Caribbean Trails (ZCQ)

Quito to Cartagena 19 days, departing 11 May 2012

Comfort Zone: Basic Luxury
Physical Challenge: Easy Hard
Trip Style: Overlanding
Route: Quito to Cartagena
Length: 19 days
Transport: Overland vehicle
Accommodation: Hotel (10 nts), campsites (5 nts), camp homestay (3 nts) Upgrades from camping to rooms usually available on the road. 18 Breakfasts, 14 Lunches, 8 Dinners

Ratings for this trip

Comfort Zone: Moderate

Moderate Comfort Level. These trips allow you to get off the beaten track with a few of your home comforts. On OVERLAND TRIPS expect there may be some wild camps, but with a predominance of campsites with good facilities (often with upgrades to rooms available) or staying in small hotels. Hotels will range from basic up to reasonably comfortable. Sharing will be on a 2, 3 or 4 person basis. On ADVENTURE HOLIDAYS we will have standard style accommodation, usually budget or tourist-class (2-3 star) accommodation with private facilities. Some accommodation may be on a multi-share basis. Transport will be a mixture of local and privately hired.

Physical Challenge: Everyday Activities

EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES: Suitable for most fitness levels. Your itinerary may include easy-paced walks or bike rides, horse riding and other non-strenuous activities. On overland trips you will be camping at least some of the time.

Countries Visited

Colombia

For most people Colombia is an unknown, the forgotten part of South America. This makes it a fantastic place to explore. Colombia's geography is one of the most diverse in South America; it really is a kaleidoscope of colour, life and culture. It has an undeserved reputation due to some internal instability but the warmth of its people mean that it is worth the challenge to see such a fascinating country. Colombia is on the beautiful Caribbean coast and the home to some of the best coffee in the world.

The culture of fiesta is a central to the national psyche with the country, playing host to some of the most fabulous carnivals in the world. The Carnival of the Barranquilla lasts four days, celebrating the tradition of Colombian dance and music.

With many festivals and parties, the opportunity to relax might sound out the question, but along with the lively ongoing parties, cooking is an important icon of Colombia. Fritanga is a set of dishes enjoyed throughout the country. A barberque style meat full of flavours and aromas that will leave your mouth watering is accompanied by small potatoes and tortilla style bread. If meat isn't your preference, then the plantain of many vegetables and pulses is a beautiful choice of a meal.

Colombia's glorious sands and upbeat lifestyle is there to be cherished, and there is no doubt it will leave a special mark on your travels.

Ecuador

Ecuador is a small country with a diverse landscape including highlands, volcanoes, numerous national parks, stunning Pacific beaches, and the enthralling Galapagos Islands.

The Amazon rainforest has the greatest bio diversity on the planet. And it's possible to take trips deep into the rainforest to see jaguars, monkeys, iguanas and uncountable numbers of insects. Off the coast is the Galapagos Islands, arguably one of the world's most prestigious wildlife destinations.

If heart racing activities is more your thing then Ecuador has plenty to offer. Surf the waves, trek through the foothills or step out of the ordinary and try some mountaineering.

Aside from the outdoors and wildlife there are lots of great coloninal towns or cities. And Quito has a more relaxed atmosphere than most Latin American capitals. Lying in a hollow at the base of Volcano Pichincha, the old city is a maze of steep cobbled streets with finely carved overhanging balconies. Its mixture of colonial and new architecture together with its European and Indian cultures make this a fascinating city.

As you explore, the discovery of food will be found and the choice of a traditional meal is hard to turn down. Ecuadorian cuisine is again diverse, and different regions boast different meals. Meat, potatoes and rice are popular in the mountain regions, where as the coastal areas boast fantastic meals containing marinades of fish onions and delectable seasonings.

There are many types of music in Ecuador and the most popular is the rhythm filled, dancing type which can get you up on your feet and joining in with the sounds of panpipes, bamboo flutes, drums and charangos.

With so much to offer and explore - Ecuador is the place to be if you want to try something new every day.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1: Quito

Fri 11 May 2012

Border information: If you are joining in Quito, enter Ecuador at Quito airport.

Free time to explore Quito with a group meeting day at 18:00hrs. We stay in local friendly hotel in Quito

Hotel for the night: Alston Inn Hotel
Alston Inn Hotel
Juan Leon Mera N23-41 y
Ventimilla
Quito
Tel: 00 593 2 22 22721

Activity	Approximate Cost
Overnight stay in historic Quito	Included in tour
Take a trip on El Telerifiqo, the world's second highest cable car	USD 4
Visit the Museo De La Cuidad	USD 2

Quito

Quito has a more relaxed atmosphere than most Latin American capitals. Lying in a hollow at the base of Volcano Pichincha, the old town is a maze of steep, cobbled streets with intricately carved, overhanging balconies. Its mixture of old colonial and modern architecture and the mix of European and Indian cultures make this a really fascinating city. Wandering around, you will come across stalls displaying Indian textiles, colourful wall hangings, jewellery, pottery and woodcarvings - and the old town has some of the best examples of Spanish colonial art and churches anywhere in the Americas.With so much to see and do, it is well worth extending your time in South America to ensure you experience all that Quito has to offer.

Day 2: Quito, Otavalo

Sat 12 May 2012

In the morning we will drive 140kms to the Indian market town of Otavalo where we stay in a friendly hotel. En route we will stop at the Equator for the must have photos.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Visit the equator at Mitad del Mundo	Included in tour
Overnight stay in the market town of Otavalo	Included in tour
Village Tour Of Otavalo	

Otavalo

Otavalo is a small town known for it's market, nestled in beautiful surroundings a short distance north of Quito. Many of the local indigenous communities in this area still wear their traditional clothing made from intricately woven and decorated fabrics, and the men tend to wear their hair in long ponytails. Infact, the Otovalan's weaving skills are quite renowned and they are rightly famous for their textiles, so rugs, wall hangings and knitwear are all well worth buying here. There are numerous other activities to do in the surrounding area, including horse-riding and trekking into the surrounding hillsides. If you have time, it may also be possible to visit the hot springs at Papallacta.

Day 3: Ipiales

Sun 13 May 2012

Border information: Exit Ecuador at Ipiales. Enter Colombia at Ipiales

Today we cross the border into Colombia to the town of Ipiales where we stay in a local hotel

Activity	Approximate Cost
Visit the jaw dropping Santuario La Lajas on the outskirts of Ipiales	Included in tour

Ipiales

Ipiales is the border town on the Colombian side of the Colombia/Ecuador frontier. The town has some pleasant plazas squares and the sight of locals using a horse and cart gives it a quaint, countryside feel.

The star attraction of Ipiales, 7 km outside of town, is the famous *Santuario de Las Lajas*, the site of many a miracle and apparition over the years. Set amid breath-taking scenery, El Santuario is a spectacular gothic-style church straddling a dramatic gorge with rushing river below. It is one of the most impressive churches on the continent and its fantastic setting and quirky museum make it a highlight of any visit to Colombia.

Day 4: Popayan

Mon 14 May 2012

An early morning start leads for a 315km drive to the beautiful town of Popayan where we stay the night in dorm accommodation in a hostel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Overnight in the beautiful old town of Popayan	Included in tour

Popayan

Nicknamed the White City, Popayan is a beautiful colonial town of white-washed houses and grand churches encircled by rolling green hills. Although the capital of the Cauca region and the former capital of Southern Colombia, Popayan somehow retains it's relaxed small town feel. The friendly locals can often be found sipping coffee in one of the city's excellent cafes or relaxing in one of the shaded parks, catching up with friends and watching the world go by.

The cool and sunny climate of the lower Andes makes Popayan a very comfortable place to stay and as the main university town of the region, there's a young, sociable feel to the city. The leafy parks marked with elegant church towers provide a sociable and relaxed location where you could easily spend an afternoon, while an evenings entertainment could be chatting with the friendly locals in a classy cafe bar or salsa club.

Whilst staying in the town there are some lovely walks offering excellent views of the Historic Centre, several worthwhile museums and galleries and many good cafes, bars and restaurants to make the most of.

Another highlight of this area is the Silvia Indigenous Market. This beautiful Andean market town is absolutely bursting with colour and energy when the market opens on Tuesdays. Guambiano Indians from the surrounding communities make their way into Silvia to sell their produce and socialise with friends from neighbouring towns.

Day 5 to 6: Cali

Tue 15 May to Wed 16 May 2012

A short 140kms drive brings us to Cali, Colombia's most lively city. In the evening you may have the chance to head out for a tour of the city in a traditional chiva bus and there is the chance for optional salsa classes and plenty to keep you entertained during the daytime too. We stay in Cali for 2 nights in a lovely hostel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Explore Cali in the evening on a chiva bus	USD 10
Enjoy Colombia's best nightlife in Cali	
Learn to Salsa like a local	USD 20
Visit Cali Zoo, probably the best in South America.	USD 5
Get wet at Cali's Water park!	USD 5
Visit Museo Arqueológico la Merced, Cali's best museum.	USD 2
Visit the Museo del Oro in Cali, with it's wonderful gold collection.	USD 1

Cali

Cali is a big and bustling city with a warm climate and pleasant atmosphere. Although there are comparatively few sights of special interest, just wandering through the mix-match architecture and relaxing in the sociable parks and plazas is a nice way to spend some time.

The city has made it's reputation in traveller circles thanks to it's nightlife and social scene and as such is increasingly popular. The Salsa capital of Colombia provides great opportunities to test out those dance moves and hit the fashionable bars and restaurants with the locals. For party seekers and those who enjoy the faster paced city life, Cali shouldn't disappoint. Avenida Sexta, is Cali's party street. With rows of bars, clubs, restaurants and cafes, this is where to head for a night on the town.

For others, the old neighbourhood of San Antonio is a lovely spot with arty, Bohemian cafes, shops and restaurants lining picturesque Colonial streets.

Alternatively why not head to Las Tres Cruces which is a great point from which to catch the best views over Cali. It's quite a hike up there but it's a peaceful spot and a nice break from the rush of the city.

Day 7 to 8: Manizales

Thu 17 May to Fri 18 May 2012

We head out early to overland 270kms to Manizales where we stay for 3 nights on a coffee plantation, camping in the grounds of a traditional finca. During the next 2 days we will enjoy a night of music and dancing, a city tour of Manizales and a coffee plantation tour.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Enjoy a night of traditional live Colombian music	Included in tour
Stay On A Coffee Plantation Near Manizales	Included in tour
Explore a working Colombian coffee plantation	Included in tour
Explore Manizales on a city tour	Included in tour

Manizales

Manizales is a friendly city right in the heart of Colombia's coffee region with a comfortable climate and plenty to see and do. Although still opening up to international tourism, Manizales has a lot to offer the visitor in the way of outdoor activities and ecological attractions. The town itself is a relaxed and friendly place centred around the magnificent cathedral with attractions such as the botanical gardens, thermal springs and eco-parks all easily access able from the centre of town. Venturing a little further, you will find coffee haciendas and plantations in the surrounding area as well as some beautiful country landscapes perfect for trekking or just taking a relaxing break in the great outdoors.

In Manizales we stay on one of these working coffee plantations covering approximately 480 acres which provides people from around the world a taste of the finest Manizales fair trade coffee. The plantation employs around 100 people all throughout the year and about 400 people during the peak picking season.

Day 9: Los Nevados National Park, Manizales

Sat 19 May 2012

We continue to stay in the grounds of the finca but spend the day in the beautiful Los Nevados National Park.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Explore the beautiful Los Nevados National Park	Included in tour
Visit The Thermal Baths At Los Nevados National Park	Included in tour

Los Nevados National Park

The Los Nevados National Park is a landscape of three mountain ranges, dormant volcanoes, hot springs, and recent memories of tragic eruptions. The highest range of the three (Nevado del Ruiz, Nevado de Santa Rosa and Nevado Tolima), is del Ruiz (5231m) which erupted in 1985, completely destroy one village. The park provides some of Colombia's finest trekking scenery and park's unique combination of snow, sand, wildlife and vegetation form a landscape of unending contrasts.

Water from the peaks and high plateau feed the drainage basin of the coffee-growing region to the west and the Department of Tolima and Magdalena Plain to the east. This beautiful and prolific water source fuels more than 50% of Colombia's national coffee production, as well as production of crops such as rice, corn, sorghum, and cotton.

Our journey will take you by road out through Manizales and into the stunning scenery of the highlands of the department of Caldas. The journey by road will be approximately 2 hours before reaching the park entrance, from here its unpaved roadway to the final car park.

Your guide will explain the climates, flora and fauna, and history of this savage but beautiful landscape. There are some amazing photo opportunities at every corner of the winding road. During the first stages you will see the Frailejon plants; this is a herb endemic to the Andean Region. You will stop further up the mountain at El valley de Las Tumbas (Valley of the Tombs) and walk to the edge of the valley where sounds reverberates around the rock formation until almost returning back to where they originated. Then a steep curving climb higher up the mountain and onto the parking area. Here we leave the vehicle and hike a 1200 metre climb to Del Ruiz. The walk is slow but rewarding as you reach the edge of the glacier and, weather permitting, you will be greeted by superb views across the mountain ranges and valleys below. You will reach the height of 5100 metres so it is important to take it slowly and read the additional notes about the affects of altitude.

With its various snow covered peaks, the park can get very cold and after a full day exploring the park we will stop off at some nearby hot springs to enable you to rest your weary legs before returning to Manizales.

Day 10 to 12: Guatapé

Sun 20 May to Tue 22 May 2012

We head north some 200 kms to the small town of Guatapé which is beautifully located aside a lake in rolling countryside. The town is famous for the towering El Peñón de Guatapé which will will visit before enjoying 3 days of camping by the lake for various activities in the local area.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Cilmb the 644 steps to the top of El Peñón de Guatapé for spectactular views.	Included in tour
Waterfall treks around Guatapé	USD 6
Horseriding around Guatapé	USD 6
Hire kayaks to explore the lakes around Guatapé	USD 6
Rent mountain bikes to explore Guatapé	USD 3

Guatapé

Guatapé is a picturesque town surrounded by the Embalse del Penol, an artificial lake built in the early 1960's and wonderful countryside yet with a colourful and historic centre. On weekends, the waterfront malecón (boardwalk) fills up with local vendors selling beautiful Paisa art, food, and souvenirs. The area is great for activities but one of the main reasons to visit is to see El Peñón de Guatapé, a 650 foot tall granite monolith that divides the countryside and offers amazing views from the top. El Peñón is very similar to Sugar loaf mountain in Rio de Janeiro and has 644 steps which you need to climb to get to the top, but it is well worth it.

Day 13 to 14: Medellin

Wed 23 May to Thu 24 May 2012

A short drive of a couple of hours takes us to Colombia's second city, Medellin where stay in dorm accommodation for 2 nights in a centrally located hostel within the Zona Rosa allowing you to enjoy the vibrant nightlife.

Activity	Approximate Cost
2 Nights to explore the vibrant city of Medellin	Included in tour
Day trip to Santa Fe de Antioquia	USD 1
Visit the Catedral Metropolitana in Medellin	USD 1
Visit Medellin's beautiful Palacio de la Cultura Rafael Uribe Uribe	USD 1
Relax and unwind on a stroll though the Medellin's gorgeous Botanical Gardens.	USD 1

Medellin

The rapid transformation that has taken place in Colombia's second largest city is one like no other. Having spent the 1980's and 90's with international reputation of one of the world's most dangerous cities, Medellín has certainly turned itself around.

With the infamous *Pablo Escobar* and the *Medellín Cartel* holding the largest drug-trafficking base here for decades, the city suffered a seriously damaged reputation amongst international travellers and has only recently become a popular destination amongst backpackers. Despite the damage of the city's past, the Paisas (as people from Medellin are known) have strived to change the it's reputation. Almost nothing of those former days can be seen in the character of the city today and visitors can comfortably enjoy the beautiful architecture, excellent facilities and all round well developed city!

Set amid the rolling green hills of the Aburrá valley and with a warm climate and comfortable altitude of 1538 metres, Medellín has seen more and more travellers flocking to the city in the past few years. With some of the country's finest museums, parks and most impressive architecture as well as a much safer and comfortable atmosphere, it's easy to see why.

Medellín is also one of Colombia's easiest cities to get around with the immaculate and convenient metro system passing all the main points of interest. If you use the metro then make sure you head up on El Teléferico, the city's cable car, as this is included on your metro ticket and gives you a great view of the city.

Why not visit the Museo de Antioquia which combines pre-colombian exhibits with displays by several of Colombia's best known artists including a collection by the famous Fernando Botero and head to the 'Jardines Montesacro' to see where the infamous Pablo Escobar is buried.

A great side trip from Medellin is Santa Fe de Antioquia. Set in a lush low lying hot and sultry valley on the banks of the Rio Cauca, Santa Fe de Antioquia is the oldest settlement in the region. Founded in 1541 it served as the capital of the department until 1826 when the state capital moved to Medellin. The town has kept much of its Colonial charm, the narrow streets and whitewashed colonial style buildings many of which with large central courtyard in which to relax away from the midday heat. The central plaza is dominated by the principal church of the town. The plaza is also home to a daily market where vendors sell various varieties of Tamarind product that grow locally, take a tour of the stalls and try a few samples of this local delicacy. There are several other churches and important colonial buildings to visit but the greatest pleasure is simply exploring the narrow streets infused with history of the region.

Day 15 to 16: Covenas, San Bernardo Islands

Fri 25 May to Sat 26 May 2012

A 525kms drive takes us to Covenas on the Morrosquillo gulf where we camp in the grounds of a local hotel near the beach for 2 nights. On the second day we will take a boat over to the spectacular San Bernardo islands for a tour of this beautiful archipelago.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Take a boat trip out to the spectacular San Bernardo islands for the day	Included in tour

San Bernardo Islands

The islands of San Bernardo are made up of ten small islands with fine beaches and are the real travel highlight of this area. Sitting within the Golfo de Morrosquillo in the Caribbean sea the archipelago belongs to the National Natural Park Corales del Rosario and San Bernardo and consists of the islands of Boqueron, Cabruna, Ceycén, islote of Santa Cruz, Mangle, Maravillar, Múcura, Palma, Pandora and Tintipán.

The Islet of Santa Cruz which is an artificial island is supposedly the most densely populated piece of land in the world with just over a thousand people in less than a hectare of land!

Not all of the islands are accessible but contain stunning beaches, marshes, mangroves and diverse wildlife ranging from flamingos and monkeys to birds and crabs of all colours.

Day 17 to 19: Cartagena

Sun 27 May to Tue 29 May 2012

We leave Covenas and head 240kms to Cartagena. We stay in a comfortable hotel in central Cartagena and enjoy a walking tour of the city and you have the chance to enjoy the many optional activities on offer.

Border information: If you are finishing in Cartagena, exit Colombia at Cartagena airport.

Activity	Approximate Cost
2 nights in vibrant Cartagena	Included in tour
Visit the mudbaths at the Totumo Volcano	USD 25
Explore Cartagena on a guided walking tour	Included in tour
Visit the historic Castillo San Fellipe	USD 20
Go Diving Or Snorkelling Out To the Islas Del Rosario	USD 10

Cartagena

Cartagena is one of the most historic cities in South America. It is legendary both for its history and beauty and tends to be a favourite of all travellers who visit it. Having been the centre of many battles, the city is heavily fortified and huge defensive walls surround its narrow cobbled streets and colonial buildings. The city is made up of various districts, the new town with its high rise hotels, apartments and nightspots; and the older colonial parts of the city. The old city is the main attraction particularly the inner walled town, packed with churches, monasteries, plazas and mansions. Wandering through the streets you get a real feel of the sense of history of this amazing city. The waters of the Caribbean surround Cartagena on three sides. It is possible to take a day trip by boat to the idyllic coral islands of Rosario. This archipeligo of small coral islands is surrounded by the largest and most magnificent coral reefs on the Colombian Caribbean coastline. Marine life is abundant and the whole area is protected under National Park status.

Visa Information:

Important Notes

The routes, activities and places visited described in these trip notes are intentions and are meant as a rough guide only.

We intend following the planned route but exact night stops cannot be guaranteed. It sometimes happens that we decide to make a change to our basic planned itinerary. This may be for a variety of reasons - climatic, road or bureaucratic conditions may demand it. By their very nature overland itineraries need to be flexible and the regions that we are travelling through are often unpredictable. We run adventure journeys in off the beaten track areas, often in areas without western infrastructure. You should expect that some these areas do not adhere to western safety standards.

Physical Preparation

Physical preparation for South America Itineraries

South America is diverse continent from high altitude, to the steamy Amazon, to baking deserts. You should therefore be prepared for the full gambit of climates. There will be time for hikking and other activities such as horse riding and you will need to be reasonably fit. Overland travel can be demanding - long, rough travel days, dusty conditions can be challenging to some. You will need to be fit enough to help every day with the camp chores (cooking, washing up, general camp set up) as well as putting up and taking down your own tent. There are some long driving days and some early morning starts. The step up into the overland vehicle, while not overly high can become tiring and you need to judge yourself to be physically fit enough to haul yourself up and down the step at least 8-10 times a day. By and large the South America trips have a good range of hotel accommodation mixed up with camping so that life is not too rough.

Note on camping kit for South America

There is a miss conception about being cheaper to buy camping equipment in South America. Every where in South America is easy to find good quality camping kit if you want to fly light, but prices are very similar to UL if not more. Please keep this in mind when you are planning your trip.

Altitude

Please note that this trip spends time above 2800 metres/9200 feet where it is possible for travellers to experience some adverse effects on your health due to the altitude, potentially including Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS), High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE) and High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE).
Because of this it is very important that you make yourself aware of the cause and effects of travelling at altitude and monitor your health during this trip.

For further information please click here to download our AMS information sheet or check out the following website www.high-altitude-medicine.com

Your leader will also hand you a copy of the AMS information sheet during your trip as well as holding a short meeting prior to travelling to altitudes above 2800m/9200ft for the first time.

If you are starting your trip in a destination above 2800m/9200ft we strongly advise reading this information prior to arrival.

Visa Information

Most countries we visit on our travels will require visas. Some are best obtained before you leave home and others can be obtained en-route. Whilst the ultimate responsibility for obtaining visas is yours, we will endeavour to assist you wherever possible.

The visa requirements for your trip vary depending on where you are from and where you are going. The information provided is given in good faith and we do try to keep the visa information as up to date as possible. Please be aware though that rules do change, often without prior warning, which is why it is important that you check for yourself.

For visas that are needed in advance you can choose to submit the applications directly to the relevant embassy /consulate. However our recommendation is that you use a visa agent to assist you with your applications. While this does increase the cost it will make the process much easier for you. Dragoman have teamed up with 'The Visa Machine' to create a safe, secure, hassle-free way of obtaining visas and visa advice. Our unique link within their website is designed to make the visa process as straightforward as possible. Simply go to https://dragoman.thevisamachine.com and click on your region of travel followed by your trip route and 'The Visa Machine' will advise you about not only the required visas but also the dates by which you should apply. 'The Visa Machine' can then assist you in the actual visa application thus taking all the worry and hassle out of the process. This should apply for ALL nationalities and countries of residence.

As you will need to submit your passport together with your applications, we recommend that you avoid making any travel plans in the weeks leading up to your departure. However if you do need to travel in this period please let us know as soon as possible so that we can help you work out the options for your visa application process.

Flying to Central or South America via the USA

If your flight to central or South America is via the USA then you MUST obtain an Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) before travel.

An ESTA can be obtained online via the following link and paying the appropriatefee - https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta/

Personal Spending

Based on the range that previous travellers have spent on trips in South America, we recommend you allow between a minimum of US$15 and a maximum of US$30 per day. This amount is usually lower in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru but slightly higher elsewhere.
This will covers expenses such as your drinks, meals whilst out and also when staying in hotels, souvenirs, tips and personal permits.

What else you need to know

Currencies & Cash

It is not really worth trying to buy local currencies before you travel. Bear in mind that many countries have strict regulations about the amount of their own local currency you are allowed to import - if you are found with amounts in excess of the allowed amounts, it may well be confiscated!

For obvious security reasons we hesitate to recommend you bring lots of cash with you, a sensible mix of cash and ATM cards is best. Most of our past passengers have said they wished they had been told to bring more cash. Apart from the convenience of being able to change money in many more places, you will sometimes get a much better exchange rate for cash.

More and more people are choosing to travel with cash passports such as TravelEx cards (you can visit www.cashpassport.com for further information on these). This is a very secure way of carrying your money whilst travelling. You treat them exactly like an ATM card and draw out local currency from an ATM within each country.

Travellers cheques have become increasingly difficult to change in South America with passengers and our leaders experiencing huge frustration and numerous hours spent trying to find a bank which will change travellers cheques. For this reason we no longer accept them on our trips.

You should take a mixture of denomination notes. However due to a recent counterfeit scam central banks in several South American countries (Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile) have temporarily banned the circulation of $100 notes bearing a series 2001 production date and a serial number starting with the letters CB or CF and ending in B2. The serial number is printed in green on the emblem. Banks and moneychangers in most countries will now only accept bills with a metallic strip running top to bottom of the bill and which are dated from 2003 or later. You should not take worn or damaged notes, or any that have been written on. Cash machines are readily available in most areas but are not always reliable therefore we recommend that you do not rely on them as your only source of cash. Credit cards such as Visa, MasterCard and American Express are the most commonly accepted, but be prepared for very high commission charges. Please do not rely on cards for daily use, as they are not always accepted outside of larger towns and cities. If you are taking traveller's cheques, we recommend that you should only take those issued by American Express. Please note that Thomas Cook traveller's cheques may be used in some places, but are becoming more difficult to change. Brazil can be difficult for changing forex, it's handy to have a cash card as backup. Please bring a mixture of small and large denominations as in more remote areas it can be hard to change amounts over $50. Kitty contributions should be at least half in cash and be in the same denominations and currencies as suggested above. Any proportion of kitty contributions paid in travellers cheques should be increased to cover the commission charge incurred in exchanging them.

Pre and post trip accommodation and connecting flights

At Dragoman we believe you should make the most of the places you visit, so if you would like to see more of your joining or finishing point cities, why not book additional accommodation to extend your stay. Dragoman can take away the hassle of time zones and language barriers by making the booking for you. This accommodation is only available at the joining or finishing city of your trip, immediately before or after the trip you are travelling on.

While Dragoman is happy to assist with booking your pre and post trip accommodation, it is important that you understand you may be able to book your own room at a cheaper rate directly through the hotel or on the internet. Our additional accommodation prices are based on the hotel's rate plus an administration fee. Please note our rates do not reflect last minute walk in rates or internet specials.

We can also book arrival airport transfers for you as long as we have your flight arrival details. These are normally payable in cash upon arrival, however we do have pre paid transfers in a few destinations.

Please contact our reservations team for details of the accommodation and transfers that we can offer as not all hotels offer this service.

Accommodation on tour

Dragoman overland trips are designed for shared accommodation, whether camping or staying in hotels and therefore do not involve a single supplement. Single travellers will share with people of the same sex for the duration of the trip, in accommodation ranging from twin to multi-share. The type and variety of accommodation is determined by conditions on each of our routes. The campsites will range from rather basic to those with excellent facilities, including swimming pools, restaurants and bars. In some cases it may also be possible to upgrade locally to bungalows, lodges or even tree-houses. One of the highlights of overlanding is that in more remote areas we will wild camp. This allows us to get far away from the tourist crowds to some beautiful, secluded spots. We will also arrange as many village or local homestays as possible, allowing us to get close to indigenous populations and ensures our money stays within local communities.

Group size?

The maximum group size we take on our overland journeys ranges from 19 to 22 depending on the geographical location, however the average number of passengers is more likely to be around 16.

Please note that there is an overlap of 2 trips in Zanzibar. This means a group starting a trip in Nairobi for example will visit Zanzibar at the same time as groups starting their trips in Dar es Salaam. In practical terms this means there could be up to 44 group members in Zanzibar at the same time.

Who travels with Dragoman?

Our passengers come from around the world and are always an interesting mix of nationalities and ages. On average there is a pretty even split, males to females and between solo travellers, couples and small groups of friends. We believe that overlanding should be open to as many people as possible and so although we have a minimum age limit of 18, as long as you are fit, healthy and passionate about travel, we are happy to take you, whatever your age is. One of the beauties of group travel is the camaraderie and friendships that are formed along the way and as well as the variety of people that you will meet.

Our Community

At any time before or after you book you can join our community - Dragoland. This is a great place to ask questions before you travel and catch up with your fellow travellers once your trip has finished. You can share photos, videos and stories You can also download a selection of free travel apps. See the home page to sign in, it's free and easy.

We also have a Facebook page where travellers regularly swap info with each other - you can join here

Our crew and guides

Our crew are passionate about travel and always up for adventure. It takes someone special to become a Dragoman leader. Our crew undergo the most intensive training program of all overland companies, spending 10 weeks learning the ropes at our base in Suffolk, UK and then up to six months on the road as a trainee. On all Dragoman overlanding trips two western crew who are responsible for the group and the overall organisation will accompany you. While not being guides in the traditional sense you can expect them to have a broad knowledge of the places visited and to offer suggestions of things to do and see. In East and Southern Africa we will also have an African camp master/cook who is in charge of running the camp and organising all of the meals. Their knowledge of the local produce makes shopping at the markets great fun and you will learn how to prepare and cook some unusual dishes. In the rest of Africa, South America and the majority of Central Asia and China we use local guides who may stay with us for just a few hours or will actually travel with us for some or all of the journey. In these cases they become a third crew member and are able to offer their local knowledge as well as a real insight into the lives of the local people.

(If travelling in East & Southern Africa, also please see the note about our code-share crew)

Your tour leader has a duty of care to all of their passengers and therefore they have the authority to ask passengers to leave the trip if they require medical assistance, are behaving in an anti-social manner or refuse to comply with local laws and customs. In all matters relating to the trip, the leader's decision will be final and we appreciate your respect of this.

Medical conditions

We ask all of our passengers to declare any pre-existing medical conditions and in some cases you will be asked to complete one of our medical questionnaires. For trips that travel to areas of high altitude we also require all passengers to complete an altitude questionnaire. The ratings for each trip are a good indication of how challenging they are and in some cases passengers should be prepared for some long driving days and possible limited facilities. We are always happy to give extra advice if you have additional concerns.

Vaccinations

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection measures vary according to region and recent bulletins issued by health authorities. It is essential to get the latest advice on the region(s) you are planning to travel in. It is essential that you check with either your doctor or a travel clinic in good time before you travel.

In the UK we have been working with Nomad Travel for many years and their website has comprehensive, up to date vaccination and health information. Dragoman customers will receive a 10% discount off all vaccinations given at Nomad Travel clinics.

A good source of up to date information is the World Health Organisation - http://www.who.int/en/

Malaria

Get expert advice before travelling about types of malaria pills and take them as instructed. Recommended types do change from time to time and from area to area. Consult your vaccination centre for the most up-to-date requirements

The mosquito usually bites between the hours of dusk and dawn and so covering up by wear long-legged and long-sleeved clothing, preferably light coloured and buttoned at the wrists can help. Do not sleep without closing windows, tent doors or, if sleeping out, use a mosquito net. Wear repellent applied directly to the skin or soaked into clothing.

Treating clothes and mosquito nets with a Permetherin solution provides significant protection. It should be available at most travel stores. Mosquito coils are useful on still nights, in hotel rooms but cannot be used inside the tents.

Meals and group participation

On an overland journey you are more than just a passenger, you're part of the crew, pitching in to set up camp, shop for food, cook and generally help out. We operate a rota system, dividing the group into smaller units of 5 or 6 people, so that these duties are shared equally amongst the group. These jobs will include things like collecting water and firewood, loading the back locker, supervising the kitty and food stores etc. While camping on overland journeys, all meals will be included in the kitty and this means that you will be working as a group to prepare meals and cook for your group. (On trips south of Nairobi we have a cook on board the truck, however you will still be required to help prepare meals). If you have any dietary requirements please tell us at the time of booking and also remind your crew at your welcome meeting. A typical camp breakfast might be toast with spreads, cereal and something hot such as eggs or pancakes as well as tea and coffee. Lunch is almost always a sandwich heaped high with healthy salad and assorted fillings, with fruit to follow. Dinner might be a BBQ, risotto, pasta dish and there is always the chance to try some local cooking. Generally our passengers find the more they put into a trip, the more they benefit from it.

Responsible tourism & code of conduct

Dragoman is committed to ensuring that we have a positive impact on local communities and that we implement policies to minimise any negative impact on the local environment. We are dedicated to making sure that we adopt a responsible attitude to the areas through which we travel and believe that our trips should benefit the local people and their environment. Dragoman recognises that we are guests of local communities and strive to make these communities our partners, so that they benefit directly from our visit.

You can find full details of Dragoman's responsible tourism policy linked from the home page. All passengers are required to obey all laws of the countries through which we pass. This particularly applies to the smuggling of contraband and possession of narcotic drugs, firearms, antiquities and ivory. Any passenger found contravening such laws or customs may be required to leave the trip immediately with no refund of the trip price.

Overland travel and security

One of the real advantages of overland travel is that the vehicle provides a very real level of security when travelling. There is no doubt that a properly equipped overland vehicle, with safes, fully lockable doors and windows is an obvious advantage when travelling in much of the world. We recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt whilst travelling for the safe-keeping of your passport, air tickets, cash and other valuable items (although most of these can be locked in the safe whilst you are on the trip) and advise passengers to leave any valuable jewellery, watches etc at home. Generally speaking, you will not be travelling on local public transport and will have the added security of travelling in a group with experienced crew on hand to offer advice.

Please note: Any personal effects that are left on the truck, even if they are stored in the safe, are left at your own risk and Dragoman cannot be held responsible for any damage or theft that may occur.

The safety of our passengers, leaders and operators is a major priority of Dragoman. With this in mind we monitor world events very closely. By the very nature of the adventure travel that we take, there are risks and hazards that are inherent in our itineraries. Dragoman makes operational decisions based on informed advice from a number of sources:

The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office travel advice

Reports from other travel companies and local suppliers

Leaders reports from off the road

Local contacts we have built up over 29 years of experience

Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. You should always make yourself aware of the travel advice before you book and again before you travel. Below are links to some of the websites

Britain. http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/travel-advice-by-country

Australia. http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/

New Zealand. http://www.safetravel.govt.nz/

United States. http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html

Canada. http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/menu-eng.asp

Dragoman has comprehensive passenger liability protection and tour operator insurance. These policies have total indemnities of £3,000,000 and £10,000,000 respectively. This is in addition to local vehicle insurance and your personal travel insurance.

Emergency contact

We have a dedicated 24 hour telephone number which should only be used once you have left the UK and in the event of a real emergency. Should you need to call the number, we will do what we can to help but please bear in mind that real progress or action may not be possible until normal office hours.

If your flight is delayed or cancelled, please let us know and then make your way to the joining hotel as instructed in theses trip notes. If you cannot get through leave a message and a contact number as these will be regularly checked and the crew informed if necessary.

Emergency Number: +44 (0) 7985106564.

Insurance

It is a condition of booking that you have comprehensive travel insurance. Without evidence of valid travel insurance you will not be allowed to start the trip.

Whatever policy you choose, you must ensure that it is designed for adventure/overland travel. As such it must cover you for adventure activities such as white water rafting, trekking, horse-riding and that the 24 Hour Emergency Assistance Company must be experienced in handling situations in developing countries – for example they have the ability to arrange repatriation from remote areas such as the Sahara or if you were trekking in the Andes. Please double check if you have annual travel and/or credit card policies to ensure they have the cover you require, as many of these policies are not able to cope with adventure travel to remote areas. We recommend that any policy has the following minimum levels of cover: Medical (incl. repatriation) £5,000,000 Personal Liability £5,000,000 Cancellation and Curtailment £5,000 Loss of Baggage, personal effects, money and other inclusions are down to personal choice.

Issues on the trip

While we always endeavour to provide the best possible holiday experience, due to the nature of travel and the areas we visit sometimes things can and do go wrong. Should any issue occur while you are on your trip it is imperative that you discuss this with your group leader or our local partner straight away so that they can do their best to rectify the problem and save any potential negative impact on the rest of your trip.

We recognise that there may be times when your group leader may not be able to resolve a situation to your satisfaction. If this is the case please contact our customer relations department on customer_relations@dragoman.co.uk. You may also choose to provide details in your feedback questionnaire which we ask you to complete at the end of your trip but we do ask you to be aware that it is very difficult for us to provide any practical help after the trip is complete.

Passports

Check that your passport will still be valid for 6 months after the end of the trip - this is important as some countries WILL refuse entry to anyone whose passport is due to expire. A temporary or "visitor's" passport is not valid on our trips. You will need to provide us with your passport details prior to departing for you trip. If you change your passport please remember to inform us.

Luggage & Kit List

Although you will not have to carry your main bag long distances you will need to help load and unload them onto the truck. For this reason we recommend that you use a backpack or soft bag rather than a heavy suitcase. During your trip your main luggage will be kept in the back locker so you will also need a small daypack. This can be used to carry your camera, water bottle and other personal effects for daily use.

The size of baggage that can be brought on this tour is limited by the locker space on the truck. Different trucks have different-sized lockers however to be safe we recommend that your bag be no larger than 66cm deep, 30cm wide, and 30cm high. The weight limit for luggage on all trucks is maximum 20kg. Backpacks should not have an external frame unless it can be easily removed and stored separately to avoid damaging other people's luggage.

Your clothes and equipment should be appropriate for the conditions you are travelling in. On overland trips Dragoman will provide all camping equipment apart from sleeping bags and ground mats (except on routes between Nairobi and Cape Town where ground mats are provided).

The clothes and equipment should be appropriate for the conditions you are travelling in, which will vary depending on which part of the world you're heading to. On overland trips Dragoman will provide all camping equipment apart from sleeping bags and ground mats*, so you'll need to bring those with you. Think about the climate and altitude of the areas you'll be travelling to, there's nothing worse than being cold at night so it's worth investing in a decent sleeping bag if it's likely to get cold. And remember even when it's warm during the day, it can often get cold at night, particularly in desert regions.

**Ground mats are provided on our non "in-depth" overland trips that run in South and East Africa, between Nairobi and Cape Town.*

For a general idea of what you need this list provides a guide:

- Sleeping bag - Check the expected climate en route. Nights in desert and mountain regions can be very cold in winter months
- Mattress or compressed foam
- A day pack is useful for short hikes in the countryside, wandering around cities, etc and also for keeping inside the vehicle for items used during the day
- 2 sets of comfortable travelling clothes (light, easily washable cotton clothes are best)
- 1 set of casual but smart clothes for evenings out. Women should bring a skirt that covers their knees and a scarf for visiting places of worship
- 2 pairs of shorts
- Sun hat or warm hat if trekking
- 1 pair of sunglasses
- Warm sweater/fleeces
- 1 waterproof jacket with hood
- 1 pair of comfortable walking shoes/boots (or ankle height canvas jungle boots)
- 1 pair of sandals or flip-flops
- Underwear and socks (thermals are also a good idea if you are travelling to altitude or to the desert as it can get very cold at night)
- Swimwear
- 2 small towels
- Washing kit, including a small mirror
- Clothes washing detergent, small scrubbing brush & washing line (just a length of cord)
- Head torch/flashlight with spare batteries & bulbs (only the 3 standard sizes of round 1.5v batteries are widely available en route)
- Passport photos (average of 2 per country for which visas will be applied for en route)
- Good water bottle at least 1 litre
- A pouch or money belt worn inside your clothing, or unobtrusive pocket sewn into the inside of a pair of loose fitting trousers, is a must.
- Alarm clock
- Pocket calculator (useful when exchanging money)
- Writing materials & notebook/diary
- Multi purpose knife
- Cotton sheet sleeping bag (or sheet folded and sewn up on 2 sides). It will help keep your sleeping bag clean, and can be used on its own on warm nights.
- Mosquito net - The tents supplied by us have mosquito netting and you will only need a net if you think you will sleep out under the stars a lot of the time.
- "Wet Ones" (moistened tissues) and hand gel
- Toilet paper – this can be purchased almost everywhere en-route but one roll is worth packing
- Assorted sized plastic bags - protects clothing and equipment from dust and damp

For a comprehensive kit lists take a look at the Dragoman kit list that Nomad Travel have created. Dragoman customers will receive a 10% discount on all equipment purchased either online or in store. Click to see the kit lists www.nomadtravel.co.uk/kitlist/overlanders-kit-list

Water

The sale of bottled water contributes to an enormous environmental problem around the world. In addition to the water in bottles, the production of a 1 litre plastic bottle takes 2 liters of water and 200ml of oil. A large proportion end up in limited landfill or discarded in waterways and natural environments.

Please avoid the purchase of bottled water by using the chemically sterilized water stored in the purpose built storage tank or in water jerry cans in your Overland vehicle. You are free to refill your bottle as many times a day as you like. You are helping the environment and your hip pocket!

Personal medical kit

All of our trucks have a fully stocked medical kit onboard for use in emergency situations only. Therefore in addition to this we recommend that you purchase your own personal medical kit. In the UK we have teamed up with Nomad Travel Stores and Clinics to produce the Dragoman Travel Medical Kit. It has been designed in conjunction with the truck kits and contains everything you would need for any minor accidents. For more details please visit their website:

nomadtravel.co.uk/catalog/view/dragoman-medical-kit

Electrical equipment

Your vehicle will be equipped with a 12 volt socket so to charge your iPod, MP3 player, camera, laptop and mobile phone you will need a DC 12 volt adapter - the type that can be used from a cigarette lighter in your car. Please be aware that only one piece of equipment can be charged at a time and it will not be allowed if there is a risk of running the vehicle's batteries low. Batteries may also be recharged from hotel room wall sockets and the majority of the campsites we stay at have electricity points so please bring along your normal charging adapters as well. You will need to ensure that you have the correct country adaptor for your specific charger.

The kitty

The Kitty is a group fund paid separately from the trip price at the start of your trip which covers all things that the whole group does, such as:

- Hotel accommodation and campsite fees
- Meals whilst camping (not in hotels)
- Activities listed as included (e.g. National Park entrances, excursions and local guides).

It is an amount that each passenger puts into a central fund and is monitored by the Dragoman crew. It's payable in full at the start of your trip, and in instalments at the start of each individual trip on combination trips

The kitty system is very unique to over landing as it allows us to have flexibility on the road. You can see exactly how your money is being spent and ensure that you are getting the best value by buying locally.

The kitty advertised in the brochure is an estimate at the time of printing. Local inflation and costs vary throughout the year and so we review kitties on a monthly basis. Once you book your trip it is very important that you check our website on a regular basis and just before departure for any changes to the kitty amount.

Your kitty can be paid in a mixture of US Dollar cash and local currency and most of our travellers choose to bring a cash passport with them for withdrawing local currency (you can visit www.cashpassport.com for further information on these). This is a very secure way of carrying your money whilst travelling. You treat them exactly like an ATM card and draw out local currency from an ATM to give to your leader within each country.

Travellers cheques have become increasingly difficult to change around the world with passengers and our leaders experiencing huge frustration and numerous hours spent trying to find a bank which will change travellers cheques. For this reason we no longer accept them on our trips.

Continuing your trip

Having an amazing trip and met a great group of people? Having too much fun to go home yet? If on your trip you decide you would like to continue, then why not speak to your trip leader who can advise you of the cost and availability of continuing your journey.

Contingency emergency fund

Sometimes, civil or political unrest, or reasons beyond Dragoman's control (e.g. a natural disaster), can mean that an itinerary is disrupted and we have to make a contingency plan. This may involve hiring alternate transport or even the whole group flying over an area. Although Dragoman will help organise travel arrangements, in circumstances outside Dragoman's control you should be prepared to contribute towards the costs and therefore we ask you to bring along a 'Contingency Fund' of USD400. In almost all cases trips run smoothly and this fund is therefore never used. We also recommend that you take along an internationally recognised credit or charge card with a decent limit in case of emergencies, such as medical treatment en route, or even the need to be repatriated; though these occurrences are rare. Remember that travel insurance policies usually only refund you for expenses after you have already paid out.

Tipping

Tipping is entirely voluntary. The Dragoman crew may be travelling with you for many weeks and usually they become good friends with most members of the group. It is sometimes easy to forget that they do work hard to ensure that you do have a great trip. If you feel you would like to tip them, they certainly would appreciate it. On a number of our trips, we also use a local guide as well as our own Dragoman crew. These guides live and travel with you through their home country and it is usual to tip them when they leave. We recommend USD10 to USD15 per person.

These trip notes have been compiled to help you prepare for your journey, once you have booked. They include the full itinerary and dates, information and kit lists, meeting hotels, insurance, vaccinations, visas, and other information that will help you get ready for your trip.

Please ensure you have an up to date version of these Trip Notes

These trip notes were printed on 22/05/2013