The Central Silk Route (AKY)

Bishkek to Ashgabat 1 days, departing 19 May 2013

Comfort Zone: Basic Luxury
Physical Challenge: Easy Hard
Trip Style: Overlanding
Route: Bishkek to Ashgabat
Length: 1 days
Transport: Overland expedition vehicle.
Accommodation: Good local hotels, yurt homestays and wildcamps.

Ratings for this trip

Comfort Zone: Basic / Adventurous

Basic comfort levels. Expect to rough it every now and again. On OVERLAND TRIPS be prepared to have some nights wild camping, campsites with basic facilities as well as some basic hotels, often on a multi-share basis. Some of the roads we travel along may be poor. On our ADVENTURE HOLIDAYS you will stay in simple, budget (1-2 star) accommodation with some shared facilities. Some accommodation may be on a multi-share basis and transport will be mainly local.

Physical Challenge: Moderate Fitness

MODERATE FITNESS: You will travel through areas that may be physically challenging. For example you may be at altitude some of the time. Depending on the trip, activities may include treks of 3-4 hours across hilly terrain, horse-riding and other adventurous activities. A moderate level of fitness is required.

Countries Visited

Kazakhstan

Between the plains surrounding the city of Tashkent and the mountain kingdom we take a road that crosses the southern steppe country of Kazakhstan. These vast swages of rolling grassland have been home to the nomadic Kazaks for hundreds of years. Unlike the Uzbeks, the Kazaks were never really a settled people, preferring the nomadic way of life. They are great horseman and the similarities between them and their northern neighbours the Mongols is striking. Their origins stem back to the time of Genghis Khan and they are a Turkic/Mongol race. Kazakhstan is the largest of the ex Soviet Central Asian countries that we visit.

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is a country surrounded by amazing scenery. The towering mountains and shimmering lakes are the perfect place for trekking and horse riding. Over 90% of the country is unspoilt counrtyside and Song Kul lake is just one of the loveliest spots in central Kyrgyzstan. Among animals found here are a diminishing number of wolves. All around the lake are lush pastures favoured by herders, who come here in summer with their animals.

Kyrgyzstan is a welcoming country, and the nationals like to welcome visitors and treat them with food. Influenced by the countries around them, traditional Kyrgyz cuisine is meat dominated. The national dish of Beshbarmak usually contains mutton and rituals are followed for the meal. Different people at the meal normally eat different parts, and it is up to the most honorable person at the table to decide this. This is normally the oldest person. Shashlik is a meat grilled over coals and is served mostly in restaurants but sometimes in the street, but it is always marinated for hours before hand, giving it a beautiful taste.

With a blend of Russian, Kazakh and Turkmen music, the folk music of Kyrgyzstan is created. The plucked stringed instrument of the Komuz is the national instrument and important part of the country's culture. Culture is important in Kyrgyzstan and the capital city is no different. Bishkek has an interesting history and it is said to have got its name from a local hero who fought for the independence of the country in the 18th century and is buried here.

What Kyrgyzstan lacks in settled history it makes up for in a wealth of nomadic traditions. What it lacks in historical architecture it more than makes up for in Central Asia's finest mountain "architecture" as Kyrgyzstan is a largely mountainous country. It is a mountain paradise surrounded by deserts, and the homeland of nomads whom Soviet power never quite tamed.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan has some of the remotest scenery on Earth. Most of the country is covered by the inhospitable Karakum Desert. The indigenous people are the Turkmen, who mainly live outside the urban centres. The cities and towns are occupied by other peoples of the region. Most Turkmen still live a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life. Their existence revolves around carpet weaving. They are immensely hospitable people whose culture and way of life has altered little in hundreds of years. The route we take through the country will allow us to get off the main route and into the desert to meet the nomadic Turkmen in their traditional yurts.

In the capital of Ashgabat lies beautiful marble palaces and gleaming golden domes. is a unique modern city that has been extensively rebuilt in the last ten years since independence. Its futuristic and outrageous public buildings are an extraordinary sight. Little is left of the original Russian Imperial city that was destroyed by a massive earthquake in the 1940s.

Relax with some traditional Turkmenistan music and hear how most people sing a-Capella or sometimes with the aid of lutes and dutars. The sounds are incredible and as the singers act as healers or magicians, the style of folk music is revealed.

The majority of Turkmen food isn't spiced but is flavoured by cottonseed oil to give it a distinct taste. Shashlyk is a skewered grilled meat and is often served in restaurants or on the streets of Turkmenistan. Plov is one of the main dishes in the country and it consists of portions of mutton carrots and rice all fried together. This dish is eaten everyday as well as been served on special occasions.

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan contains many cultural treasures. This is the land of the great Khanates and Sultanates, the kingdoms that controlled the towns of the Silk Route, such as Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand. This country is the Silk Route at its best.

The capital is Tashkent, and dating back thousands of years, it started life as a little oasis at the hills of the Golestan mountains. As it has come into the present day, it has brought many treasures with it. Explore the city and find statues, museums and art galleries.

Follow the Silk Road and venture into the city of Samarkand. Samarkand is the great sultanate of Timur. This is the romantic city of the silk route. This is the city of the great Registan Square, where beautiful Medressas are loaded down with ornate majolica and azure mosaics. This city has enough majesty and magnificence to satisfy even the most ardent of culture vultures.

Next along the silk route is Bukhara, it feels lived in and has a real feel of living history. This is the atmosphere of Central Asia before the Russian domination. The colours of the city are browns, but the buildings are spectacular, especially the Ark Fortress, the Ismail Samanid Mausoleum and the Kalyan Minaret (Death Tower). The third of the main UNESCO sites is Khiva and is the best preserved Khanate. Its long bloody history is fascinating. The walls that used to provide sanctuary for the travellers on the Silk Route are intact as is the old town inside. The old town is beautifully decorated in classic turquoise tiles.

Uzbekistan is covered mostly by the Kyzyl Kum desert and striking mountain ranges. These are home to some of the beautiful wildlife that roams through the country. Brown bears, deers and the rare snow leopard all can be seen, and it is a world away from the urban areas of the country.

The music in Uzbekistan is similar to Persian classical music. Especially the style of Shashmaqam. This traditional sound makes use of lutes drums and jingles to create poetic love songs. This sound adds to the endless reasons as to why Uzbekistan is an awe inspiring country to visit.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1: Bishkek

Sun 19 May 2013

Border Information: If joining in Bishkek, enter Kyrgyzstan at Bishkek Airport.

Trip meeting at 10:00hrs in our hotel in Bishkek.

The rest of the day is free for you to explore this relaxed and atmospheric city. Overnight in comfortable Bishkek hotel with good facilities.

Hotel for the night: Hotel Asia Mountains
Hotel Asia Mountains
1a Lineinaja St
Bishkek 720021
Kyrgyzstan
Tel: +996 312 694 075

Activity	Approximate Cost
Begin our journey in picturesque Bishkek	Included in tour

Bishkek

Bishkek is the relaxed capital of Krygyzstan with a pleasant laid-back atmosphere. The city centres around Ala-too Square, previously known as Lenin's Square under the previous Soviet regime. Lenin used to stand in his concrete overcoat in the middle of the square, proudly gesturing towards the mountains. For those interested in their Soviet memorabilia, a larger than life Frunze can also be found still sitting on a bronze horse facing the train station, though his name plaque has been removed - and you can still visit the museum built over Frunze's birthplace. A pleasant place to watch the world go by is Dubovy (Oak) Park, where you'lll find a few open air cafes, perfect spot to sit and have a drink and soak up the atmosphere. The century old oaks here and all along Freedom Avenue make Bishkek one of the greenest cities in Central Asia.

Day 2 to 3: Chong Kemin Valley

Mon 20 May to Tue 21 May 2013

Early in the morning of day 2 youset off towards the Chong Kemin Valley National Park. The second day is free to explore this stunning area including opportunities for short hikes and possibly the chance to meet nomadic Kyrgyz families in the surrounding area. Camping overnight.

Please note that trips running in May to mid-June, October and November will not camp in the Chong Kemin Valley if temperatures are too low. Instead we will stay in a small village called Semyenovka and overnight in yurts. We will need to remain flexible with these itineraries as temperatures can vary.

Activity	Approximate Cost
3 nights wild camping and a leisurely overland journey through the stunning mountains and National Parks of Kyrgyzstan	Included in tour
A beautiful journey through the Chong Kemin Valley	Included in tour
Rafting through the stunning Chong Kemin valley, stopping in the most picturesque locations.	USD 25

Chong Kemin Valley

Chong Kemin lies within the Tian Shan mountain range seperating Kyrgyzstan and Kazakstan. Their peaks reach above the legendary threshold of 7000 m elevation in its ruggerd run towards China.

This spectacular valley is famed for it's natural beauty, abundant wildlife and rich, varied flora. This is the reason why Chong Kemin Natrional Park was founded in 1977.

The valley offers several trekking possibilities from easy short walks along the Chong Kemin River to adventurous and tough hikes over 4000m passes, ceratinly not for the faint hearted. Recently white water rafting has become a popular activity for visitors in the area, However if it's a more relaxing experience you are after, exploring this stunning valley on horseback is a great alternative.

Day 4: Kara-kol

Wed 22 May 2013

Early start as you set off for your drive around the Northen shore of Lake Issyk-Kul to the Russian-style town of Karakol. You will visit the Petroglyphs near Cholpon-Ata en route. Overnight in a local hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Journey around the whole of Lake Issyk-Kul via the Russian-style town of Karakol.	Included in tour

Kara-kol

Kara-Kol is a picturesque town surrounded by orchards and mountains, with a delightful Russian church and gracious colonial houses on tree-lined streets sloping up towards glaciers and pine forests.

Day 5 to 6: Jeti-Oghuz Valley

Thu 23 May to Fri 24 May 2013

Today you'll drive to the alpine trekking region of Jeti-Oghuz. You spend 2 nights here to give you time for valley and canyon hikes. You will camp overnight.

Please note that trips running in May to mid-June, October and November will not camp if temperatures are too low. Instead we will stay for 1 night in Jeti-Oghuz in a local hotel and then spend the second night in Altyn Arashan, a hot spring development enroute to Karakol again in a local hotel. We will need to remain flexible with these itineraries as temperatures can vary.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Trek into the wilds of the Jeti-Oghuz Gorge on the edge of the Tian Shan mountains	Included in tour

Jeti-Oghuz Valley

Seven spectacular red sandstone cliffs stand guard over the entrance to the Jeti-Oghuz Valley. Local tradition says that the cliffs were once wild bulls, immobilised by the gods to stop them terrorising local yurt dwellers. The base of this stunning canyon lies on the northern slopes of the Terskei Ala-Too range, surrounded by a broad valley and majestic snow-capped mountains. The valley is a fantastic place for camping and hiking, exploring the valleys and canyon by foot you'll be able to admire the unusual rock formations and alpine peaks.

Day 7: Kochkor, Kochkor Homestay

Sat 25 May 2013

Today we drive to the small village of Kochkor where we stay in local homes and enjoy traditional Kyrgyz hospitality. Whilst here we will visit a small museum and women's felt making cooperative that produces 'shyrdaks', the felt carpets for which Kyrgyzstan is renowned.

Accommodation is in home stays, accommodating up to 8 guests in each home.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Overnight homestay at a traditional rural Kyrgyz village	Included in tour

Kochkor Homestay

Kochkor is a sleepy little Kyrgyz village and looks very much like the paintings of traditional Kyrgyz life seen in various museums and art galleries throughout the country. Here we will stay for the night with a traditional Kyrgyz family, living with them and finding out about their daily life, food and family patterns. The Kyrgyz have embraced Responsible Tourism and

actively encourage travellers to stay in the homes of local people. There is an excellent local animal market and a traditional felt making enterprise which we usually visit. Here they make a variety of the different felts used for making yurts, rugs, carpets and souvenirs.

Day 8 to 9: Song Kol Lake

Sun 26 May to Mon 27 May 2013

Morning drive to Song-Kul Lake where you spend the next two nights. The afternoon and tomorrow is free to explore the area; Options include hiking, riding on ponies or watching a game of goat polo! Tonight we stay in felt yurts.

Please note that trips running in May to mid-June, October and November will not visit Song-Kul Lake as temperatures will be below freezing. Instead we will stay in yurts on the Southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul. We will need to remain flexible with these itineraries as temperatures can vary.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Experience the daily life of the Kyrgyz mountain shepherds.	Included in tour
2 nights in Kyrgyz yurts near Song Kul Lake	Included in tour

Song Kol Lake

Song Kol lake is one of the loveliest spots in central Kyrgyzstan. The lake and shore are part of the Song Kol zoological reserve. All around the lake are lush pastures favoured by local nomadic herders, who come here in the summer with their animals. On Dragoman overland trips we spend a couple of days staying in felt yurts, learning about the local culture and traditions. We might get to see the local men play a game of "ulak-Tartys" (goat polo) or have a chance to ride out with the shepherds on their small hardy ponies, or you might prefer to explore the surrounding area on foot, hiking in the hills. Song Kol really is a sublime and unique spot, it is a truly magical place where you are guaranteed to have travel experiences that you will never forget.

Day 10 to 12: Kyrgyz Fergana Valley

Tue 28 May to Thu 30 May 2013

You'll spend the next 3 days overlanding through the stunning Kyrgyz Fergana Valley Camping en route.

Please note that trips running in May to mid-June, October and November will not camp if temperatures are too low. Instead we will stay in local guesthouses along the route. We will need to remain flexible with these itineraries as temperatures can vary.

Activity	Approximate Cost
3 nights wild camping and a leisurely overland journey through the stunning mountains and National Parks of Kyrgyzstan	Included in tour

Day 13: Arslanbob

Fri 31 May 2013

Today we drive to Arslanbob in Kyrgyzstan's Ferghana valley. There are many opportunities for hiking in this area.

We stay overnight in a local guesthouse.

Day 14: Ferghana City, Fergana Valley

Sat 01 Jun 2013

Border information: Exit Kyrgyzstan at Dustlik, Enter Uzbekistan at Andijon.

This morning youn will cross the border and enter Uzbekistan. Site-seeing this afternoon in Kokand and visit Kokand's Khan's Palace and Mosque.

Overnight in a hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Overland through Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley including historic Kokand and Fergana City	Included in tour

Ferghana City

Similar to the Uzbek capital Tashkent, Ferghana is a modern city, far-removed from the ancient Silk Road cities of Bukhara and Samarkand. The town is located in the Fergahana Valley, a broad bowl thousands of kilometres wide surrounded by far off mountain peaks. Nearly 90% of people who live here are indigenous Uzbek's and the communities here are typically very welcoming and hosptiable. A very fertile area, the land is highly cultivated and used to produce fruit and vegetables and cotton. The textile industry thrives here and there are some exceptional craftspeople weaving beautiful fabrics. It may be possible for you to visit a local factory or workshop where you will be able to see how silkand other fabrics are still hand-woven and dyed here.

Day 15: Tashkent

Sun 02 Jun 2013

Today you will drive to Uzbekistan's capital, Tasheknt.

Overnight in a hotel

Activity	Approximate Cost
One night to explore Urban Tashkent	Included in tour
History Museum of the People of Uzbekistan.	USD 2
Art Gallery of Uzbekistan.	USD 0.3
Museum of Applied Arts.	USD 0.6

Tashkent

Tashkent was once the fourth largest city in the Soviet Union. Whilst the historic cities of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva still retain much of the atmosphere of the ancient Khanates, Tashkent is very definitely a Soviet city, because old Tashkent was largely destroyed by a series of earthquakes and Soviet planners. Having said that, it is still a great place to visit. The city has a clean, modern feel and there is some unusal contemporary architecture here, which makes it an interesting contrast to many other places along the Silk Road. The city markets (especially the Chorsu Bazaar) are well worth strolling around, you can get some excellent souvenirs here as there is a huge amount of Soviet ephemera on sale, ranging from entire Soviet stamp collections, old paintings of Lenin, through to Military uniforms. You should also try to plan a journey that involves a trip on the metro, so you can take in the impressive architecture and decoration of the Tashkent underground. Then after a busy day sightseeing, you might like to head out for a meal at one of the old Imperial Russian style nightclub/restaurants which often put on some unbelievably risqué cabaret.

Day 16: Tashkent

Mon 03 Jun 2013

Free time in Tashkent.

Day 17: Tashkent

Tue 04 Jun 2013

Border Information: If joining in Tashkent, enter Uzbekistan at Tashkent Airport.

Joining meeting at 10.00 hrs in our hotel in Tashkent.

Afternoon free to explore the city. Staying overnight in comfortable hotel with good facilities.

Hotel for the night: Grand Orzu Hotel
Grand Orzu Hotel
27 Makhmud Tarobi Street
Tashkent
Uzbekistan
Tel: +998 71 120 88 77

Activity	Approximate Cost
One night to explore Urban Tashkent	Included in tour
History Museum of the People of Uzbekistan.	USD 2
Art Gallery of Uzbekistan.	USD 0.3
Museum of Applied Arts.	USD 0.6
Chorsu Bazaar.	USD

Day 18: Samarkand

Wed 05 Jun 2013

This morning we drive to Samarkand where we will be staying for the next 3 nights. Whilst in Samarkand we stay in a small friendly hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
3 nights discovering the majestic splendour of Samarkand	Included in tour
Guri-amir Mausoleum.	USD
Bibi Hanum Mosque.	USD
Hazrat-Hizr Mosque.	USD 0.5
State Art Museum.	USD 1.5

Samarkand

In the 14th century the city of Samarkand was the capital of the great sultanate of Timur. Thanks to it's cemtral location along the Silk Route, the town originally grew propserous as a crossroads between East and West, creating a melting pot of different cultures and traditions whose influences are still very much apparent event today. Samarkand is perhaps the most romantic and evocative of the Silk Road cities, and crowned by the decorative domes and minarets of the many beautiful buildings here it certainly looks the part. The must-see's include Registan Square, which feels like the centre-point of the city, home to a group of impressively decorated Madressas, Guri Amir and the Shah-i-Zinda mausoleum.

Day 19: Samarkand

Thu 06 Jun 2013

Today we will explore Samarkand in the truck, exploring the majestic buildings, monuments and bazaars of this romantic silk route city. Second night in small friendly hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Guided visits to Shakh-I-Zinda, Registan Square & Tamerlane's Tomb in Samarkand	Included in tour

Day 20: Samarkand

Fri 07 Jun 2013

Second full day in Samarkand. Free time for you to explore the great sultanate of Timur as you please. Third night in small friendly hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Visit to Shakhrisabz city	USD 60

Day 21: Nurata

Sat 08 Jun 2013

Morning drive to Nurata in the Kyzylkhum Desert. After lunch there is the option of taking a swim in Lake Ajdar Kul or going for a local camel ride. Overnight homestay with local Uzbek families in their desert yurt camp amongst the dunes.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Overnight in the Kyzylkum Desert staying in yurts.	Included in tour

Nurata

Nurata is home to the Nurata mountains and is famous for it's old circle patterned Suzani which sell for thousands at auctions. Dating back to The Bronze Age, you can see how amazingly historical this place is with so much knowledge to be gained here. The history doesn't stop there, as there are tenth century mosques and the place where the Chashma Springs formed.

Day 22: Bukhara

Sun 09 Jun 2013

Morning free to explore more of Nurata. In the afternoon we drive on to the fascinating city of Bukhara. We spend the next 3 nights here, staying in a comfortable local hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Wander the historic bazaars and markets of Bukhara where unbelievable bargains can be had	Included in tour
The Prison 'Zindon'.	USD

Bukhara

Bukhara is an atmospheric city alive with it's history. Exploring the streets, you get the feeling that this is how Central Asia was before Soviet domination. Bukhara was once a very powerful Khanate, controlling most of Turkmenistan and the surrounding area in years gone by. This has left the city with a rich and interesting history and many of the buildings here are spectacular, particularly the Ark Fortress, Ismail Samanid Mausoleum and the famous Kalyan Minaret (also known as the Death Tower). Today the Government has invested a considerable amount of money into the city, in order to preserve the architecture here, as some of the buildings are considered to be the finest in all of Uzbekistan.

Day 23: Bukhara

Mon 10 Jun 2013

Today we will explore Bukhara and the surrounding area, including the Ismail Samani Mausoleum, Kalon Mosque, Zindon Prison and Ark Fortress. Second night in a comfortable local hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Guided city tour of Bukhara, including the Ark Fortress, Death Tower and Ismail Samanid Mausoleum	Included in tour

Day 24: Bukhara

Tue 11 Jun 2013

Today is free for you to explore more of Bukhara and the surrounding area, or to just kick-back and take it easy for the day. Third night in comfortable local hotel.

Day 25: Khiva

Wed 12 Jun 2013

Most of today will be spent travelling as we drive from Bukara to Khiva. We stay in Khiva for 2 nights in a friendly, rustic hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Guided tour of the UNESCO heritage site of the old walled city of Khiva	Included in tour

Khiva

The small historic town of Khiva in Uzbekistan was once the capital of Khwarezmia and the Khanate of Khiva, a central asian state that existed from the 1500's right through until 1924, when it was fully incorporated into the Soviet Union. The city's long history is fascinating and fortunately much of the magnificent architecture has been incredibly well preserved. The ancient walls that used to provide sanctuary for the travellers on the Silk Route are intact, as is the old town that the walls were built to protect. Many of the buildings are beautifully decorated in classic turquoise tiles. As well as exploring the streets of the old city, you should make sure you visit the Kukhna Ark & Juma Mosque, Pakhlovan Mahmus Mausoleum and Islam Hodja Madrassa.

Day 26: Khiva

Thu 13 Jun 2013

This morning we have a guided tour of this ancient city. The afternoon is free to explore this wonderfully preserved Khanate town. Second night in friendly, rustic hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Guided tour of the UNESCO heritage site of the old walled city of Khiva	Included in tour

Day 27: Kunye Urgench

Fri 14 Jun 2013

Border Information: Exit Uzbekistan at Nijazov, enter Turkmenistan at Shovot.

Morning drive from Khiva to the border, crossing into Turkmenistan around lunchtime. Afternoon visit to Kunye Urgench ruins. Wildcamping overnight.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Overland into the green Oxus Valley to the ancient ruined city of Kunye Urgench	Included in tour

Kunye Urgench

Kunye Urgench is situated on the shores of the Amu Daria River and was once the capital of the Khorezm region, which was part of the Achaemenid Empire. The old town is brimming with historic buildings dating back as far as the 11th century, including a mosque, mausoleum and towering 60-m high minaret.

Day 28: Darwasa

Sat 15 Jun 2013

We drive across the Karakum Desert. If tme allows we will make a side trip to see the amazing Darwasa Gas Crater. Second night wildcamping.

Darwasa

From Darwasa, it's possible to hire local vehicles to visit the incredible open gas crater that's located nearby. It's a truly breathtaking sight; imagine a huge crater approximately the size of a football pitch, ablaze with a fire fed by natural gas vents, or failing that try to envisage what the entrance to the Underworld would look like, and chances are you'll be pretty close!

Day 29: Ashgabat

Sun 16 Jun 2013

Morning drive to Ashgabat, normally arriving mid-afternoon. Whilst in Ashgabat we stay in a comfortable local hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Discover the bizarre modern city of Ashgabat with its great hotels and restaurants	Included in tour

Ashgabat

Ashgabat is a unique modern city that has been extensively rebuilt over the last ten years since the country gained independence. Little is left of the original Russian Imperial city as most of it was destroyed in a massive earthquake in 1948, today the centre is a unique mix of futuristic and outrageous public buildings that are an extraordinary sight. The earthquake affected every family in Ashgabat and is ingrained in the psyche of the local people. The Earthquake monument and museum are well worth a visit, as are the Carpet and the National Museums. If you are into carpets, Turkmenistan is the country to visit, and if you are in Turkmenistan, Ashgabat's Sunday Market is the place to buy them. This wonderful market stretches for hundreds of acres into the desert. Carpets, camels, clothes, pigs, jewellery, goats, cars, chickens, hats and ex soviet military paraphernalia are readily available.

Day 30: Ashgabat

Mon 17 Jun 2013

Morning visit to Ashgabat's famous Sunday market. Afternoon free to explore Ashgabat as you choose. Second night in comfortable hotel.

Activity	Approximate Cost
Explore, shop and haggle at the vast Tolkuchka Sunday Market	

Day 31: Ashgabat

Tue 18 Jun 2013

Border Information: If finishing in Ashgabat, exit Turkmenistan at Ashgabat Airport.

Free time in Ashgabat.

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.

Ashgabat to Bishkek Visas

In order to make the visa process as easy as possible we have teamed up with The Visa Machine.

Please click on Ashgabat to Bishkek Visa Information link where you will be able to view all the visa cut off dates and all your visa information for ALL departures.

Bishkek to Ashgabat Visas

In order to make the visa process as easy as possible we have teamed up with The Visa Machine.

Please click on Bishkek to Ashgabat Visa Information link where you will be able to view all the visa cut off dates and all your visa information for ALL departures.

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Turkmenistan Eastbound

All visitors to Turkmenistan require a visa and this must be obtained **in Advance.** Visas can only be issued once a letter of Invitation (LOI) has been obtained.

The cost of the visa varies depending on your nationality.

Starting any trip in Ashgabat

If you are flying into Ashgabat you can obtain your visa on arrival at Saparmurat Turkmenbashy International Airport. This will cost approximately US$ 85. A printed copy of your approved Invitation letter will be required at the check-in desk for your flight to Ashgabat as proof of visa authorisation. Dragoman will once again apply for this on your behalf but please note, Dragoman will require exact details of your intended arrival date and flight details before we can start this process.

Turkmenistan Westbound

All visitors to Turkmenistan require a visa. It is possible to obtain this visa at the land border on all westbound trips. Visas can only be issued once a letter of Invitation (LOI) has been obtained.

The cost of the visa varies depending on your nationality.

Uzbekistan Eastbound

Most nationalities require a visa to visit Uzbekistan. You should obtain a visa **in advance.**

A letter of invitation is required for most nationalities to obtain an Uzbekistan visa. These are issued for specific dates according to your itinerary.

Some nationalities **may not** need an Invitation letter if applying for an Uzbek visa in their country of residency (citizens of the US, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, France, Japan, Spain, Switzerland and Latvia). However please note that if you are planning to apply for a visa outside of your country of residency, an Invitation letter will be required. We also advise you to check with the Embassy at which your application will be processed for exact information on documents required.

All nationalities should check with their respective embassies for more information and costs.

*Please note that if you decide to obtain your visa in a different location (to that stated on the Central Asis visa form), a new letter of invitation will be required which will **delay** you obtaining your visa therefore it is vital that you are clear on where you will obtain your visa. *

Uzbekistan Westbound

Most nationalities require a visa to visit Uzbekistan.

A letter of invitation is required for most nationalities to obtain an Uzbekistan visa. These are issued for specific dates according to your itinerary.

Some nationalities **may not** need an Invitation letter if applying for an Uzbek visa in their country of residency (citizens of the US, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, France, Japan, Spain, Switzerland and Latvia). However please note that if you are planning to apply for a visa outside of your country of residency, an Invitation letter will be required. We also advise you to check with the Embassy at which your application will be processed for exact information on documents required.

All nationalities should check with their respective embassies for more information and costs.

*Please note that if you decide to obtain your visa in a different location (to that stated on the Central Asia visa form), a new letter of invitation will be required which will **delay** you obtaining your visa therefore it is vital that you are clear on where you will obtain your visa. *

Information to help fill in your visa application form is below.

Name of Host – Please contact your agent to obtain this information.

Address in Uzbekistan– Grand Orzu Hotel,
27 Makhmud Tarobi Street,Tashkent,
Uzbekistan

Tel: +998 71 120 88 77

Kyrgyzstan

Please obtain your visa in advance if a visa is required. We advise you to check this with your nearest Consulate, Embassy or visa agent.

Citizens of the countries listed below intending to visit Kyrgyzstan for a duration of up to 60 days DO NOT require a visa to visit Kyrgyzstan but we recommend you check this information with your nearest Embassy or Consulate.

Australia, Austrian Republic, Bahrain, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany, Greece, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Kuwait, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway , Poland, Portugal Republic, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, USA, Vatican.

*A visa is required for above mentioned nationals intending to stay in Kyrgyzstan more than 60 days.

How to obtain a Letter of Invitation

Dragoman will apply for the letter of invitation on your behalf. In order to do this we need you to complete the Central Asia & China visa form found here https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14ph3QNCaqsR6WhXd8WwIaUcTSQ_in5RrMM4iD19KJbw/viewform. Once you have completed this form we will require you to email the following documents to hello@thevisamachine.co.uk and centralasiavisas@dragoman.co.uk.

1. 1.scanned copy of your passport (Clear, colour copies only)
2. 2.Letter of Employment (a letter from your employee stating that you are employed by the company and that you are travelling for tourism purposes only). Students need to provide details of their University and a letter from the university stating you attend. If you are self-employed or retired please indicate this on the Central Asia Visa

Please complete the Central Asia visa form as soon as possible after booking. Any delays in returning this form, along with the associated documents, will have a knock on effect to the amount of time you have in applying for the actual visa.

Once this letter has been authorised a copy will be sent to you. You can then begin the process of applying for your visa. Please be aware that the invitation letter is only valid for a 3 month period, you must apply for a visa within 3 months of the invitation letter being issued.

*Please note that if you decide to obtain the visa in a different location a new letter of invitation will be required which will **delay** you obtaining your visa therefore it is vital that you are clear on where you will obtain your visa. *

For further information and details of how to fill out your application form please visit http://dragoman.thevisamachine.com/ and search for your trip.

Where to obtain your visa

Eastbound

Turkmenistan - In Advance or Ashgabat Airport

Uzbekistan - In Advance

Kyrgyzstan - On arrival (if a visa is required)

Westbound

Kyrgyzstan - On arrival (if a visa is required)

Uzbekistan - In Advance / Bishkek

Turkmenistan - Land Border

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.

Visa note

Visas for this trip can take many weeks to be issued and it can be a lengthy process. Please ensure that you book early to avoid disappointment. Central Asia visa support letters are included in the trip price. NB: These are not the actual visas but necessary supporting documents, visa costs are a separate to the trip price.

Please note that from time to time some visa applications are rejected by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Turkmenistan and /or Uzbekistan or incorrect dates given for travel. If this happens, Dragoman will contact you as soon as it is known and we will help you arrange alternative travel plans. Unfortunately Dragoman Overseas Travel cannot be held responsible if your visa application is refused.

Weather Note

We will be travelling through high remote mountains and the itinerary may have to vary somewhat due to weather or road conditions. When it is is too cold to visit Song Kol Lake or camp (May/October/November) we will run a alternative itinerary which may include a yurt stay on the southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul, a night at a homestay or a night at a hot spring development know as Altyn Arashan.

We will need to remain flexible with these itineraries as temperatures can vary.

Kyrgyzstan

The climate of this mountainous country can vary significantly depending on the time of year and the region. There are four main climatic zones in Kyrgyzstan:

1. The valley zone (from 500-1,000m) is characterized by hot summer temperature, up to 28C (82F) and moderate cool winters. It rarely snows in these areas. Summer temperature generally ranges between 20C (68F) and 25C (77F), winter temperature falls between -4C to -7C (+19 to +25F).

2. The middle mountain zone (from 1,000-2,200m) enjoys a typical moderate climate with warm summer and cold steady snow during the winter. Average summer temperature in July is 18C (64F); average winter temperature in January is around -7C (19F).

3. The high mountainous zone (2,200-3,500m). Summer is cool while winter is cold with a lot of snow. July temperature is about 15C (59F). Winter is long (November-March) with January temperature around -10C (14F). In the highest regions of this zone the period when water is not frozen is only around 3-4 months.

4. Nival zone (from 3,500m and higher) is characterized by a very severe, cold climate. It is a zone of snows, rocks and glaciers. Even in the lower region of this zone the average July temperature does not exceed 7C (45F) and in January temperatures drop to -20C (-4F).

The climate in China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran and Turkey also can vary significantly depending on the time of Year. We recommend you check local average weather conditions for each country you will be travelling to in order to properly prepare for your trip.

Physical Preparation

Physical preparation for Asia Itineraries

In Asia you will need to be healthy enough to cope with extremes of climates from the hot deserts through to the colds of the high mountains. Overland travelling 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 our Asia trips have a good range of hotel accommodation mixed up with camping so that life is not too rough.

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.

Personal Spending

Based on the range that previous travellers have spent on this trip, we recommend you allow between a minimum of US$15 and a maximum of US$30 per day for Central Asia, China and Burma and between a minimum of US$10 and a maximum of US$20 for India, Nepal and South East Asia.

This will cover individual expenses such as drinks, meals whilst out and also when staying in hotels, souvenirs, tips and personal permits.

Please note: For trips in Southern India that occur over Christmas and New Year please allow approximately **$130USD** extra on the kitty for seasonal increases in accommodation costs

What else you need to know

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.

Currencies & Cash

It is not really worth trying to buy local currencies before you travel. Do also 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 trips in Turkey, South East Asia, India and Nepal a sensible mix of cash and ATM cards is best. However, 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.

For trips in Central Asia, China, Burma and Mongolia please refer to the money exchange notes.

You should take a mixture of denomination notes. 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. Please bring a mixture of small and large denominations as in more remote areas it can be hard to change amounts over $50.

Money Exchange

Turkmenistan

The official currency of Turkmenistan is the manat (M). It's set at a fixed government exchange rate, but traded for far less on the black market. As ATM's are virtually non-existent, you're best to exchange foreign currency once inside the country. Don't bother with travellers cheques - they're not accepted anywhere. The black market is easy and accessible to foreigners, and the only place you'll get a realistic exchange rate.

Uzbekistan

The official currency in Uzbekistan is the Uzbekistan Som (UZS) this can only be obtained in Uzbekistan. Conversion of UZS back into other foreign currencies may prove difficult.
Banks are rarely able to exchange foreign currency so you should ask the advice of your hotel or leader for where to change money. There are also many private money changers in Uzbekistan but if you choose to use them you must be sure to check the rate and your change carefully.

Major credit cards are rarely accepted in shops and restaurants even in bigger cities. Some banks in Tashkent will allow cash advances against a credit card but cash withdrawals are subject to a 5% or more service charges.

In Tashkent you may be able to find ATMs that accept international cards and use them to withdraw local currency; however these should not be relied on as your sole financial source. Some souvenir sellers and tourist restaurants may accept USD or EUR as payment but all other purchases in Uzbekistan must be made in local currency.

Please note that you must declare ALL currency (including travellers cheques) on entry to and exit Uzbekistan. Failure to do so accurately, or exiting the country with more currency than when you entered may result in delays, fines or the additional sums being confiscated.

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Kyrgyzstan

The official currency in Kyrgyzstan is the Kyrgyzstan Som (KGS).This can only be obtained within Kyrgyzstan. Conversion of KGS back into other foreign currencies may prove difficult. There are many private money changers in Kyrgyzstan, but if you choose to use them you must be sure to check the rate and your change carefully. Major credit cards are rarely accepted in shops and restaurants even in bigger cities. Some banks in Bishkek will allow cash advances against a credit card but cash withdrawals are subject to a 5% or more service charge.

In Bishkek you may be able to find ATMs that accept international cards and use them to withdraw local currency; however these should not be relied on as your sole financial source. Some souvenir sellers and tourist restaurants may accept USD or EUR as payment but all other purchases in Kyrgyzstan must be made in local currency.

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 19/05/2013