

MOUNTAINS, KINGDOMS & DESERTS OF ASIA, (TCT)

Ashgabat to Istanbul 35 Days, departing 25th July 2022



TRIP OVERVIEW

Trip Style: Overlanding

Route: Ashgabat to Istanbul

Duration: 35 Days

Transport: Overland Expedition Vehicle, Overnight Boat, Private Bus

Accommodation: Comfortable Hotel 9 nights
Basic Hotel 5 nights
Overnight Boat 1 night
Guesthouse 5 nights
Wild Camp 3 nights
Homestay 2 nights
Camping without facilities 4 nights
Multishare Hostel 5 nights

Meals: Breakfasts x 15, Lunches x 6, Dinners x 14

Physical Challenge: ● ● ○ ○ ○

Your itinerary may include easy-paced day walks, bike rides, and other activities that are not too strenuous.

Lifestyle Challenge: ● ● ● ● ○

This is a fairly challenging trip; you may well be travelling at high altitudes, across deserts or through cold and windy or hot and steamy areas. The terrain and roads may be rough and the facilities can be very basic or non-existent. There may be some long drive days followed by wild camps, and physically and mentally it can be tough, but there will be some rest days and time to relax as well.



DAILY ITINERARY

Day 1 - Ashgabat (25th July 2022)

Today we will have an included tour of the city of Ashgabat using local minibuses. The afternoon will be free to freely explore Ashgabat and its museums.

Accommodation: Ak Altyn Hotel A""

Daily Activities

Included Activities

Explore the unique and bizarre Turkmen capital of Ashgabat on a guided tour of the city

Included

Optional Activities

See a myriad of incredible and impressive hand-woven carpets in the Ashgabat Carpet Museum (if open)

Entrance: 10 USD

Learn about the history and culture of Turkmenistan at the huge National Museum in Ashgabat

Entrance: 10 USD

Day 2 - Turkmenbashi (26th July 2022)

This morning we have a full days drive to Turkmenbashi, on the shore of the Caspian Sea. If time permits we will stop at the spectacular Kow Ata Underground Lake on the way.

Our itinerary in Turkmenbashi and over the Caspian Sea must remain very flexible and is very much determined by sailing times of the local ferries. Please note that there is no regular schedule for the ferries, they are notoriously unpredictable, and information from the ferry operators regarding the sailing times constantly changes (or is non-existent) up until the point of departure. Maximum flexibility, open-mindedness and co-operation with your tour leaders are absolutely essential here!

In Turkmenbashi we will stay in a local hotel for as many nights as is needed until we finally depart on the ferry over the Caspian Sea. Most trips tend to be able to set off on the ferry 1 or 2 days after arriving in Turkmenbashi.

Azerbaijan Visa Note - as the timing of the Caspian ferry crossing can be very unpredictable, please get your Azerbaijan E Visa issued with at least 2 - 3 extra days before the entry date listed on these notes. Please see the detailed visa notes below.

Daily Activities

Included Activities

Ashgabat Sapar Haji Mosque

Included

Visit the huge Turkmenbashi Ruhy mosque on the outskirts of Ashgabat built in 2004 as the mausoleum of Saparmurat Niyazov the first president of Turkmenistan after the fall of the Soviet Union

Included

Bakhardan Underground Lake

Included

Day 3 - Caspian Sea (27th July 2022)

From Turkmenbashi, we will take the ferry across the Caspian Sea to Baku in Azerbaijan.

The ferry is a fantastic local experience, but please do not expect any luxury whatsoever! These ferries are budget vessels for the locals and cargo hauliers, and are not designed with tourists in mind. We must be prepared for very basic conditions and limited provisions on board.

Please also note that the time that the ferry takes to cross is also highly unpredictable, as it is often forced to wait outside of the port in Baku while they arrange the unloading of the cargo on the boat.

There will be basic seats on the ferry overnight. Generally there are no cabins available for passengers.

Daily Activities

Included Activities

Turkmenistan Caspian Ferry Cabin

Included

Day 4 - Baku (28th July 2022)

Border information: Exit Turkmenistan at Turkmenbashi, enter Azerbaijan at Baku.

Today we plan to disembark the Caspian ferry and enter Azerbaijan.

We will have free time on these days to explore the sights of Baku and the surroundings.

Please note that if the ferry is severely delayed we may not have much time to explore the town of Baku and will need to continue on to catch the itinerary up.

Day 5 - Baku (29th July 2022)

Today we will have a free day to explore Baku - depending on when our ferry arrives into Baku.

Daily Activities

Optional Activities

Audio Guided trip around old town Baku including the Maiden Tower & Shirvan Shakh Palace

City Tour: 10 AZN

Learn all about the Shirvan Muslim history of Baku at the Palace of the Shirvanshahs

Entrance: 15 AZN

Explore the mysterious and iconic Maiden's Tower in Baku's Old Town

Entrance: 10 AZN

Take a trip to the Absheron Peninsular near Baku, and visit the Yanar Dag natural gas vents and the Suraxani Zoroastrian Fire Temple (if time allows)

Suraxani Fire Temple: 2 AZN

Yanar Dag: Free

Day 6 - Baku (30th July 2022)

Border Information: If joining in Baku, you will most likely enter Azerbaijan at Baku Heydar Aliyev International Airport (IATA code: GYD).

There will be an important group meeting at 6.00pm - please look out for a welcome note from your tour leader when you arrive at the joining hotel in Baku.

Please note that many of the options listed below will only be possible for those with extra time in Baku before the start of your trip with us - please contact your Sales Agent if you would like to book pre - tour accommodation with us to have extra time exploring Baku.

** Important note - please do not bring any medicines containing tramadol, codeine, temazepam, morphine or opiates to Central Asia. These are illegal in all circumstances in most of Central Asia and you will risk arrest. If in doubt about a particular medicine, please do not bring it. See the notes at the bottom for more details. **

Daily Activities

Optional Activities

Audio Guided trip around old town Baku including the Maiden Tower & Shirvan Shakh Palace

City Tour: 10 AZN

Explore the mysterious and iconic Maiden's Tower in Baku's Old Town

Entrance: 10 AZN

Learn all about the Shirvan Muslim history of Baku at the Palace of the Shirvanshahs

Entrance: 15 AZN

Day 7 - Baku (31st July 2022)

Today we will have free time to explore all the sites of Baku and the surroundings.

Daily Activities

Included Activities

Lahj Coppersmiths

Included

Day trip to Gobustan to see the mud volcanoes and the petroglyphs

Included

Gobustan Petroglyphs

Included

Day 8 - Lahij Village (1st August 2022)

This morning we will make our way to Lahic Village. An old coppersmiths village, nestled in the mountains.

Daily Activities

Included Activities

Explore the exquisite Palace of the Sheki Khans, built in 1797

Included

Sheki Teze Bazaar

Included

Day 9 - Sheki (2nd August 2022)

Leaving the village behind we make our way to the old town of Sheki this morning. Here we can visit the exquisite Khan's Palace.

Day 10 - Lagodekhi (3rd August 2022)

Meals: Lunch, Dinner

Border Information: Exit Azerbaijan at Balakan, enter Georgia at Lagodekhi.

Today we will continue our journey west and cross the border into Georgia.

We will wild camp tonight, most likely in the Lagodehki National Park shortly after crossing the border.

Day 11 - Telavi (4th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today we will drive to the Alazani valley and on to Telavi, where we will base ourselves for 2 days to explore this fascinating region. We will visit the Gremi citadel en route, and have a free afternoon on arrival in Telavi to explore the area.

Daily Activities

Included Activities

Hike to beautiful 14th-century Gergeti Trinity Church set in the stunning mountains above Stepantsminda

Included

Optional Activities

Learn how to make the local delicacy of kinkhalis (Georgian meatballs) at a cookery class in Stepantsminda (if time allows)

Cooking Class: 20 GEL

Stepantsminda Gergeti Jeep

Jeep to church: 60 GEL

Day 12 - Telavi (5th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

The area of Telavi is well known for its vineyards and wineries - there are hundreds of different grapes grown here, and every village has its own particular variety. We will visit some of the local vineyards today, where we can hopefully see some of the local traditions including grape harvesting and wine making, and enjoy some famous Georgian hospitality.

Daily Activities

Included Activities

Head out on Telavi's 'Big Day Out' - a tour of the town's monasteries bee-keepers and textile-weavers followed by lunch and wine tasting at a local family-run winery

Included

Day 13 - Stepantsminda (6th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today our journey begins with a beautiful drive to the spectacularly located town of Stepantsminda (formerly known as Kazbegi).

Either this afternoon or tomorrow morning, we will take a trek up to the Tsminda Sameba Church (the Church of the Holy Trinity), a beautiful small church nestled in the mountains.

Day 14 - Mtskheta (7th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

We spend the morning in and around Stepantsminda, where we can trek to the Tsminda Sameba Church if we haven't done so already.

This afternoon we have a beautiful drive to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Mtskheta, the ancient capital of Georgia. Whilst here we will explore the 11th century Svetitskhoveli Cathedral.

Day 15 - Borjomi-Kharagauli NP (8th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

After breakfast we will make our way to Borjome National Park where we will have time to do a small hike through the ancient forest and an optional cable ride up the mountain.

In the afternoon we will continue on to Vardzia where we will find a place to wild camp for the night in the stunning valley. If time permits we will have an included visit to the Vardzia Caves this afternoon if not we will have the chance to explore them tomorrow morning also.

Day 16 - Armenian Highlands (9th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

We continue south towards the Armenian border this morning. Once we have crossed we will drive through the beautiful Armenian Highlands before finding a place to bush camp for the night.

Day 17 - Yerevan (10th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we will make our way to the city of Yerevan. On the way we will have an included visit to Khor Virap Monastery.

Day 18 - Yerevan (11th August 2022)

We have a free day today for any optional activities or simply spend the time relaxing and soaking up the city atmosphere.

Day 19 - Lake Sevan (12th August 2022)

Meals: Lunch, Dinner

We will leave the city of Yerevan behind this morning and make our way to the World Heritage - listed Geghard Monastery which has been carved out of the rock face of the Azat River Gorge. We will also spend some time exploring the Garni Temple before we continue onto the beautiful Lake Sevan.

Day 20 - Tbilisi (13th August 2022)

Border information: If you are joining in Tbilisi, you will most likely enter Georgia at Tbilisi International Airport (IATA code: TBS).

There will be a pre-departure meeting at 6.00pm - on arrival please look out for a note from your leader with more information about this important meeting.

Please note that many of the options listed below will only be possible for those with extra time in Tbilisi before the start of your trip with us - please contact your Sales Agent if you would like to book pre-tour accommodation with us to have extra time exploring Tbilisi.

Important note - do not bring any medicines containing tramadol, codeine, temazepam, morphine or opiates to Central Asia. These are illegal in all circumstances in most of Central Asia and you will risk arrest. If in doubt about a particular medicine, please do not bring it. See the notes at the bottom for more details.

Daily Activities

Optional Activities

Enjoy an evening of local dancing and music at a Georgian restaurant in Tbilisi

Dinner & Show: 35 GEL

Discover the highlights of Tbilisi on a guided tour of the Old Town

Sightseeing transport: 40 GEL

Discover the folk architecture craftwork and culture of the various regions of Georgia at the Giorgi Chitaia Open Air Museum of Ethnography

Entrance: 2 GEL

Guided Tour: 10 GEL

See the grandiose modern Holy Trinity Cathedral of Tbilisi the seat of the Georgian Orthodox Church

Entrance: Free

Learn all about the history of Georgia during Soviet times and the struggle for independence at the Museum of Soviet Occupation

Entrance: 3 GEL

Guided Tour: 10 GEL

Explore the ancient Narikala Fortress and take in the fantastic views of Tbilisi below

Entrance: Free

See the incredible collection of historical artefacts at the Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia

Entrance: 3 GEL

Guided Tour: 10 GEL

Visit the beautiful Orthodox Sioni Cathedral in Tbilisi's Old Town

Entrance: Free

Relax with a dip or a massage at a traditional Georgian sulphur bath house

Public Pool: 2 GEL

Massage: 20 GEL

Day 21 - Kutaisi (14th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

This morning we drive to Gori, the birthplace of Stalin - here we will have a guided tour of the city and the Stalin Museum.

We then make our way to the ancient town of Kutaisi. This afternoon we will visit the medieval Bagrati cathedral and the Gelati monastery.

Daily Activities

Optional Activities

Visit the beautiful 11th-century Bagrati Cathedral a symbol of the city of Kutaisi

Entrance: Free

Day 22 - Batumi (15th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we will continue to the port town of Batumi, where we will have a free afternoon to explore.

On the way we will visit the Prometheus Caves

Daily Activities

Included Activities

Explore the colossal and awe-inspiring Prometheus Caves near Kutaisi

Included

Day 23 - Sumela (16th August 2022)

Meals: Lunch, Dinner

Border Information: Exit Georgia at Sarpi, enter Turkey at Sarp.

This morning we will continue to the border and cross into Turkey. We will reach the Sumela Monastery near the town of Macka, which we will either visit in the afternoon or the next morning.

We will camp overnight in a campsite near Sumela if conditions allow. Or we may opt to stay in a local hotel in Macka or Trabzon.

Day 24 - Zara (17th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

This morning we will visit the beautiful Sumela Monastery if we didn't have time yesterday, and then start our drive through central Turkey towards Göreme.

We will break the journey with a wild camp near Zara or the village of Alucra.

Day 25 - Goreme (18th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we will complete our drive to Göreme, a small enchanting town in the heart of the Cappadocia mountains.

In Göreme we will stay 2 nights here in a well-equipped hostel - please note that dorm beds are sometimes used here.

Daily Activities

Optional Activities

Head out for a fun evening of dinner and various Turkish dancing displays

Entrance & Show: 30 EUR

Day 26 - Goreme (19th August 2022)

Today will be a full day to explore Goreme, including a guided tour of the enchanted valley of Cappadocia. There will also be an opportunity for a magical optional balloon ride over the valley during your time here.. Weather permitting.

Daily Activities

Included Activities

Guided tour of Cappadocia and underground troglodyte cities and caves

Included

Optional Activities

Explore the ancient pre-iconoclastic Byzantine rock monastery of Zelve

Entrance Open Air Museum: 15 TRY

Take a hot air balloon flight over Cappadocia

Price: 240 EUR

Discover the incredible scenery of Cappadocia on horseback

2 hour ride: 45 EUR

4 hour ride: 85 EUR

Drive through the stunning landscape of Cappadocia on an ATV quad biking trip

2 hour ATV ride: 35 EUR

4 Hour ATV Ride: 65 EUR

8 hour ATV ride: 90 EUR

Day 27 - Egirdir (20th August 2022)

After breakfast we will continue south towards the town of Egirdir, today will mostly be a travel day.

Tonight we will wild camp near the small town of Egirdir or stay in a guesthouse depending on the time of year and weather.

Day 28 - Olympos (21st August 2022)

Meals: Dinner

This morning we will continue onto the ancient beach town of Olympos on the Southern Turkish coast.

On the way we will make a small detour to visit the ancient city of Termessos in Gulluk Dagi National Park.

This evening we will walk up to the Chimera Fire Mountain and toast some marshmallows.

We will have 2 nights in Olympos staying in multi share accommodation.

Daily Activities

Included Activities

Hike up Chimera Mountain and witness the natural phenomenon of never ending fires emerging from the rocks.

Included

Stop off for a visit to Termessos the ancient mountain top city

Included

Day 29 - Olympos (22nd August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today we will have time to explore and participate in optional activities today or simply take a dip in the cool turquoise waters on one of the many beaches.

Daily Activities

Optional Activities

Half day Sea Kayaking adventure exploring the many different caves and beautiful coastline of the Southern Turkish Coast.

Sea Kayaking half day: 15 EUR

Olympos Canyoning

Canyoning - Full day: 45 EUR

Day 30 - Pamukkale (23rd August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today we will head back inland to the small village of Pamukkale. Either this afternoon or tomorrow morning we will have time to visit the thermal hot springs and traverse the travertine pools and terraces.

Daily Activities

Optional Activities

Admire the brilliant white travertine terraces and submerge yourself in the warm mineral rich pools and hot springs

Entrance to Hot Springs: 50 TRY

Day 31 - Selcuk (24th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast

We only have a short drive this morning to make it to our next destination Selcuk where we will have two nights. On arrival we will have free time to explore the local area or simply relax in one of the many cafes or tea bars which are great for people watching.

Day 32 - Selcuk (25th August 2022)

Today we will have a full day exploring the Ephesus Ruins and Terraced Houses

Day 33 - Gallipoli (26th August 2022)

After breakfast we will leave Selcuk and drive to Halki following the coast. Here we will have an included tour of the Troy Ruins.

In the afternoon we will cross the Dardenelles by ferry to arrive into Ecebat where we will stay the night.

Daily Activities

Included Activities

Guided tour around the ancient ruins of Troy

Included

Day 34 - Istanbul (27th August 2022)

Meals: Breakfast

Rising early we will have an included tour of Gallipoli with our local guide.

After lunch we will then jump on the truck one last time to make our way to the bustling city of Istanbul.

Daily Activities

Included Activities

Pay your respects to the fallen at Gallipoli on a guided tour through the battlefields

Included

Optional Activities

Explore the majestic Topkapi Palace the huge palace of the Ottoman Sultans for over 400 years

Entrance & Treasury: 40 TRY

Explore the phenomenal Blue Mosque built by the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed I - a stunning icon of Istanbul

Entrance is free but can give a donation: Free

Visit the incredible Byzantine cathedral of Hagia Sophia built in the 6th century

Entrance to the gallery: 40 TRY

Explore the colossal markets of the Grand Bazaar - once the centre of all trading between Europe and Asia and the most visited tourist attraction in the world

Price: Free

Istanbul Hidden City Tour

Tour: 50 TRY

Explore the atmospheric underground Basilica Cisterns built by the Byzantines in the 6th century

Entrance: 20 TRY

See the splendour of Istanbul from a boat trip on Bosphorus Strait which marks the boundary of Europe and Asia

Half Day Cruise: 17 USD

Day 35 - Istanbul (28th August 2022)

Border information: if leaving the trip in Istanbul, you will most likely exit Turkey from Istanbul Atatürk International Airport (IATA code: IST).

Today will be free to explore the many sights of the incredible exotic city of Istanbul, including the Grand Bazaar, the Bosphorus River and the phenomenal Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia!

Today is the end day for passengers finishing their trip in Istanbul. Please note there is no accommodation included on the trip tonight - please contact the Sales team if you are interested in booking extra nights of accommodation in order to fully explore and take part in some of the optional activities listed below.

Accommodation:

ITINERARY DISCLAIMER

The routes, activities and places visited described in these notes are intentions and are meant as a rough guide only. By their very nature, overland itineraries need to be flexible and the regions that we are travelling through are often unpredictable. We intend to follow the planned route but exact night stops and inclusions cannot be guaranteed and it sometimes happens that we decide to make a change to our planned itinerary. This may be for a variety of reasons; climatic, road or bureaucratic conditions may demand it. Changes to the itinerary may occur with little notice so please be prepared for modifications to your trip.

Drive Times

Drive times are listed in the day-to-day itinerary. These are the approximate number of hours that the vehicle will be in motion, and does not include any time taken for coffee or lunch stops, border crossings, photo stops, activities en route, comfort breaks, shopping stops, toilet stops, etc. The times given are approximate estimates only and whilst given with the best of intentions, the drive times are heavily dependent on traffic, road conditions, weather, police roadblocks, and many other factors.

Accommodation and Meals Included

The type of accommodation and included meals are listed for each day of the itinerary. These listings show our intention and on most departures the listings will be accurate. However due to the flexible nature of overland itineraries, climatic, bureaucratic or road conditions may demand changes to our listed intentions or groups may simply decide to amend the plans from time to time.

Optional Activities

A selection of optional activities is listed in the day-to-day itinerary. This list is designed to be a helpful guide as to what is commonly available in each location, and is neither an exhaustive list, a guarantee that the activity is available, or an endorsement or recommendation. Certain activities may not be available on your particular visit and it may not be possible to do all the activities listed in the time available at each destination. It is recommended to give yourself extra time in your joining or ending city if you would like to participate in some optional activities there. Prices listed are for entrance only and do not include transport costs to and from the sites or local guides unless indicated. The prices are displayed according to our latest information and in the best faith, but prices do fluctuate due to exchange rates, season, numbers of participants, and simple increases from the operator, and therefore any prices listed are a guide only and cannot be guaranteed. If you partake in any optional activities, you do so at your own risk and it must be clearly understood that your participation is your own decision and does not form part of your contract with Dragoman. You may be required to sign/complete a waiver form or optional activity form for some optional activities. For more information around activity safety and insurance, please see the Essential Information document.

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

In the event of a real emergency once you have left your home country, please contact us on our out of office hours number. If you cannot get through on the phone, please leave a message with your name, reference number, contact details and a message with the help that you need and we will get back to you. Please bear in mind that real progress or action may not be possible until normal office hours, depending on the issue.

If your flight is delayed, please inform us as soon as you can and then make your way to the joining hotel as instructed in the Joining Point section of these notes.

Out of hours Number: +44 (0) 7985 106564

A FEW RULES

We expect all group members to act respectfully towards our staff and other group members. Bullying will not be tolerated.

Engaging in commercial or exploitative sexual activities, committing acts of violence or threatening violence towards local people, other group members or any member of our staff is not allowed. Any customer engaging in such activities will be required to leave the trip immediately with no refund of the trip price.

You must at all times comply with the laws, customs, foreign exchange and drug regulations of all countries visited and conduct yourself in accordance with our responsible travel policy. Any customer found contravening such laws or regulations will be required to leave the trip immediately with no refund of the trip price.

Although we are aware that in some parts of the world taking, carrying or selling drugs, or carrying weapons may be legal, it is not acceptable for Dragoman customers and our tour leaders have the right to ask you to leave the trip immediately with no refund of the trip price if you are found to be engaging in such activities.

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.

IMPORTANT NOTES

OVERLANDING LIFESTYLE

Dragoman was founded in 1981, and has had many years of experience of leading overland trips across 4 continents. Overlanding is all about sharing a great travelling experience with like-minded people. On your trip you'll travel in one of Dragoman's purpose-built iconic expedition vehicles on an off-the-beaten-track adventure along rugged roads, experiencing the sights, sounds and smells of the world up-close. Your journey will be overland, sometimes across vast distances, so some long days spent driving are inevitable - but these will be interspersed with breaks of a day or two at a destination or activity.

On an overland journey, you are more than just a passenger and everyone gets involved setting up camp - we supply the tent but it's up to you to pitch it! As part of your trip, you will be assigned a truck job which could be collecting firewood or water, luggage loading, organising food, stores, etc. Like all great adventures, the more you put in the more you'll get out! For more details of how an overlanding trip works, please see the Essential Information document.

SAFETY STANDARDS

We run adventure journeys in off the beaten track areas, which often have poor infrastructure. You should expect that some of these areas do not adhere to 'Western' safety standards. For more information, please see the Essential Information document

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN REMOTE AREAS

We will be travelling to areas in remote locations where medical assistance will not be available, and communications may be sparse. We do not carry satellite phones on our regular trips. Therefore, if you have a medical condition such as a heart condition that would put you at risk, we would suggest that this is not the trip for you. Also, please be aware that should an emergency occur, there is likely to be a considerable delay in accessing medical care, and by joining our trip you accept this risk.

VISAS, HEALTH, INSURANCE & MONEY

Before you travel there are vital things to consider such as:

- Any visas needed for your trip
- Any vaccinations needed (please consult your GP or travel clinic)
- Organising your local payment (the kitty)
- Buying travel insurance (insurance is compulsory to be allowed to join our trips)

For more information on these topics, please see the Essential Information Document.

EXPLORATORY TRIP WARNING - THIS IS A NEW TRIP FOR US!

Please note that all or part of this trip is a brand new itinerary, and is going through completely new areas for Dragoman. This is what we call an Exploratory trip, and it means that all the passengers on this trip will be the route's pioneers for the first season!

While we have thoroughly researched all aspects of this new route and put the itinerary together with the best of intentions, please note that your crew will be finding a lot of information out for us on the ground and will be playing a lot of things by ear. The itinerary may be altered in places where it becomes necessary and the drive times may differ significantly from the published estimates.

Most Exploratory trips will have slight or significant changes made to them after this first season, and frankly we would be very surprised if an Exploratory trip was to run perfectly to the published itinerary. Usually we find that this is rarely a problem but rather an exciting feature and that there are much more pleasant surprises in store than unpleasant ones. You will be immersing in the camaraderie with your crew and fellow travellers and give you the fantastic opportunity to shape the trip as a group.

However, the warning is sincere and this trip must be viewed as Exploratory - if this concerns you or you would rather stick to a tried-and-tested itinerary, then we recommend that you wait a year or two until we have this itinerary perfected following operating it many times, or of course to consider one of the more established trips in our extensive portfolio.

There will be numerous challenges on this trip including border delays, visa and paperwork delays, potential re-routing at short notice, lack of western facilities, road closures and other obstacles and unforeseen issues.

There is a risk of cancellation if the FCDO advise changes (as of now the route is safe to travel all the way through).

West and Central Africa will test everyone's patience due to potential issues with obtaining visas. This is likely to lead to long delays in places where there may not be much to do. It may also be necessary to fly over some places which would be at your own expense.

This trip will have a higher level of participation compared to our other Dragoman trips and you will be required to help out with setting up camps, cooking etc. The campsites are also likely to be basic for much of the trip along with a high number of bush camps.

This will be a challenging trip and you must be fit in order to participate. If you have a pre-existing medical condition or any medical concerns you should check with your doctor prior to travel that this would be a suitable trip for you. You should also be aware that in the event of accident or illness, access to medical centres will be limited.

On the flip side, we'll be visiting regions and areas very rarely seen by Western travellers. Meeting people who have perhaps never seen foreigners. Enjoying the chaotic and buzzing cultures of West and Central Africa. And of course, the immense satisfaction of completing a classic adventure that only a handful of people ever get the chance to complete.

VERY IMPORTANT NOTICE ABOUT MEDICATIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Please note that as of 2014 all medications containing **tramadol, codeine, temazepam, morphine, opiates or any containing similar constituent components** have been made illegal in Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. This includes many over-the-counter medicines that are commonly available elsewhere, such as Nurofen! Please see here for more information - <http://sambuh.com/procedure-psychootropic-substances.html>

It is very important that you do not bring any such medications as the customs officials will treat this as though you were trying to bring illegal narcotics into the country. The rules are strict; it does not matter if you are only transiting through, and it makes no difference if you have a prescription or a doctor's note. Please do not bring these medications to Central Asia under any circumstance. The consequences could be huge, not only for yourself but for the tour leaders, for Dragoman's future operation in the region and especially for our local agents and guides.

Please note that we cannot allow you to travel on a Central Asia trip if you refuse to dispose of such medicines or refuse to co-operate with the tour leaders if they need to inspect any personal medicines. Thank you for your understanding in this matter.

If you have any prescription medications that do not come under the above list, please bring the prescription along and declare the medicines on any customs declaration forms throughout your trip.

TURKMENISTAN NOTES

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Please note that any additional accommodation in Turkmenistan must be booked through Dragoman due to the strict controls on foreigners in the country - it is essential that everyone is registered immediately upon their entry to Turkmenistan at accommodation booked by the agent on your visa Letter of Invitation, as such it is not possible to independently arrange your own accommodation here. It is also now compulsory for all passengers arriving into Turkmenistan through Ashgabat airport to be met on arrival by an official representative from our local supplier and have a confirmed transfer to their hotel. These transfers can be booked directly through your sales agent. If you do not have a confirmed transfer upon arrival you may be refused entry into Turkmenistan.

Due to strict Turkmenistan Laws, foreigners are not permitted to travel outside of Ashgabat without being accompanied by an official guide from a registered company. If travelling on a Dragoman Trip and you wish to explore Turkmenistan further any additional time must be booked through our registered supplier as a private tour and we must be notified at the time of booking as it is not possible to travel with 2 different company's in the same visit. Any Additional nights in Turkmenistan must also be booked at a registered hotel in Ashgabat.

Please also note that there are strict laws against tobacco products in Turkmenistan. Whilst it is not yet completely illegal to possess tobacco, it is strictly prohibited to smoke in any public place, is illegal to sell tobacco, and is illegal to import more than 2 small packs of cigarettes. Breaking these laws even slightly can lead to large fines and even detention in jail. To be safe, it is highly recommended to simply not bring any tobacco products into Turkmenistan and avoiding their use entirely until you have left the country. All the above also applies to vaping, e-cigarettes, etc. Your crew may insist on such material being disposed of before entering through the country on the overland truck, and your co-operation with this is both appreciated and expected.

AZERBAIJAN NOTES

GEORGIA NOTES

ARMENIA NOTES

TURKEY NOTES

Please ensure you have an up to date version of these notes. **These notes were printed on the 15th June 2021**