

THE MARCO POLO EXPLORER, (EUB)

Beijing to Istanbul 105 Days, departing 2nd August 2021



TRIP OVERVIEW

Trip Style: Overlanding

Route: Beijing to Istanbul

Duration: 105 Days

Transport: Overland Expedition Vehicle, Metro, Taxi, Local Bus, Boat, Jeep, Russian Bus, Overnight Boat, Private Bus

Accommodation: Comfortable Hotel 24 nights
Basic Hotel 34 nights
Guesthouse 11 nights
Camping without facilities 8 nights
Yurt Camp 5 nights
Homestay 5 nights
Wild Camp 10 nights
Overnight Boat 1 night
Multishare Hostel 5 nights

Meals: Breakfasts x 57, Lunches x 20, Dinners x 32

Physical Challenge:



Depending on the trip, activities may include treks of 3-4 hours at altitude or across hilly terrain, multi-day treks at sea level, horseback riding, canoeing and other adventurous activities. A moderate level of fitness is required.

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 - Beijing (2nd August 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Border Information: if joining in Beijing, you will most likely enter China at Beijing Capital International Airport (IATA code: PEK).

There will be a group meeting today at 6:00pm - please look out for a note from your tour leader at the hotel reception with more information about this important meeting. The rest of the day will be free to explore the incredible city of Beijing!

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

Accommodation: Hu Guo Si Hotel A""

Day 2 - Beijing (3rd August 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we will head out on the Beijing metro to the city centre's famous Tiananmen Square, which we will walk through and then take a tour of the Forbidden City. We will then have a free afternoon to further explore the many sights, sounds and flavours of Beijing.

Day 3 - Chengde (4th August 2021)

This morning we will start our journey with a drive to the city of Chengde.

Day 4 - Chengde (5th August 2021)

Today we will have a full day to explore the Puning Temple and the famous Imperial Summer Resort.

Day 5 - Jinshanling (6th August 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

This morning we will have a short drive to one of the world's most incredible sights - the Jinshanling section of the Great Wall of China! We will have time this afternoon to thoroughly explore and walk along the Great Wall.

Day 6 - Datong (7th August 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we will drive to the city of Datong in China's Shanxi province.

Day 7 - Datong (8th August 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

On the following day we will head out of Datong in the truck on an included visit to the awe-inspiring Yungang Buddha Caves.

Day 8 - Wutai Shan (9th August 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

This morning we continue to the stunning mountainous area known as Wutai Shan, one of the holiest sites of Chinese Buddhism and a major centre of pilgrimage in the country. We will have an included visit to the incredible Hanging Monastery en route.

Day 9 - Wutai Shan (10th August 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we will have a full day to explore the area and visit its incredible array of temples and religious sites.

Day 10 - Pingyao (11th August 2021)

Today we will drive to China's best-preserved ancient walled town, Pingyao.

Day 11 - Pingyao (12th August 2021)

We will stay for 2 nights in Pingyao, giving us plenty of time to explore this ancient town and surrounding sites such as the Mian Shan Mountain Resort and the Zhangbi Underground City.

Day 12 - Pingyao (13th August 2021)

Today we will have another free day to explore Pingyao and its surroundings.

Day 13 - Lijiashan (14th August 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we continue our journey to visit the ancient village of Lijiashan, famed for settlement of cave dwellers and still home to more than 600 families. We will stop en route for an included visit to the Black Dragon Temple just outside of Lijiashan.

In Lijiashan we will stay in a cave room, run by a local family and set up for guests.

Please note that some caves include a traditional 'Kang Stove bed'. The Kang bed is a hollow platform made from bricks that is used both as a bed and as a work area, these are common in remote villages in Northern China. In winter a coal fire can be lit under the bed, providing a huge amount of warmth day and night and it is very common for the whole family to sleep on one large bed. This means there may be times that members of the group may have to share 1 large bed with others in the group.

Day 14 - Yan'an (15th August 2021)

Today we make our way to the city of Yan'an.

Yan'an is famous for being the ending point for those on the 'Long March', and became the CCP headquarters for a brief period. During our time here we have an included visit to the Revolutionary Museum and the CCP Headquarters site.

Day 15 - Xi'an (16th August 2021)

Today we will drive to the amazing city of Xi'an, the ancient capital of Shaanxi province and the end of the 'Silk Road'! On arrival we will have a free afternoon to explore the city of Xi'an, its famous walls, bell and drum towers, pagodas and Muslim Quarter.

Day 16 - Xi'an (17th August 2021)

This morning we head out of Xi'an on the truck to the site of the world-famous Terracotta Warriors, where we have an included visit and a guided tour. We will return to Xi'an for a free afternoon to further explore this diverse city.

Day 17 - Xi'an (18th August 2021)

Border Information: if joining in Xi'an, you will most likely enter China at Xi'an Xianyang International Airport (IATA code: XIY).

Welcome to the amazing city of Xi'an, the ancient capital of Shaanxi province and the end of the 'Silk Road'! We will have a free day to explore the city, its famous walls, bell and drum towers, pagodas and Muslim Quarter.

There will be a group meeting today at 6:00pm - please look out for a note from your tour leader at the hotel reception with more information about this important meeting.

Please note that many of the optional activities listed will only be possible for those with extra time in Xi'an before the start of your trip with us - please contact the Sales team if you would like to book pre-tour accommodation with us to have extra time exploring Xi'an.

Day 18 - Xi'an (19th August 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

This morning we head out of Xi'an on the truck to the site of the world-famous Terracotta Warriors, where we have an included visit and a guided tour.

We will return to Xi'an for the afternoon, where we'll have a free afternoon to further explore this incredible city.

Day 19 - Pingliang (20th August 2021)

Today we will drive to the town of Pingliang at the base of the Mount Kongtong, one of the holiest mountains in Chinese Taoism.

Day 20 - Pingliang (21st August 2021)

Today we will have an included visit to Mount Kongtong, and will have the full day to explore the temples and walk and explore the pilgrimage routes on the mountain.

Please note that if the group and leader prefer to split the drive between Turpan and Dunhuang over 2 days, there will only be 1 night in Pingliang and a half-day exploration of Mount Kongtong.

Day 21 - Xiahe (22nd August 2021)

Today we set off to the enchanting Tibetan town of Xiahe where we spend the next 3 nights.

Day 22 - Xiahe (23rd August 2021)

The next few days are free to explore this beautiful town and surrounding grasslands. We can take a guided visit to the Labrang Monastery where Tibetan monks can be seen doing their daily rituals and chants.

Day 23 - Xiahe (24th August 2021)

On your second free day there may also be a chance to go trekking, horse riding or exploring the surrounding grasslands, visiting Tibetan families and perhaps trying the local Yak butter tea.

Day 24 - Liujiaxia (25th August 2021)

Today we will leave Xiahe behind us to reach the small city of Liujiaxia. We will have an included visit to the incredible Bingling Si Buddha Caves en route.

Day 25 - Zhangye (26th August 2021)

Meals: Lunch, Dinner

Today we will have a full day's drive towards Zhangye. This evening we will find a place to camp in the hills surrounding Zhangye.

Day 26 - Jiayuguan (27th August 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we will have a short drive to the incredible Zhangye Danxia Rainbow Mountains - we will spend some time exploring the beautiful scenery, before continuing our drive on to Jiayuguan where, tomorrow, we will have an included visit to the Jiayuguan Fort - the most western point of the Great Wall of China. Please note that the Great Wall here is adobe, unlike the more famous stone sections further east.

Day 27 - Dunhuang (28th August 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we will continue our journey westwards to reach the city of Dunhuang.

Day 28 - Dunhuang (29th August 2021)

Today we will have an included visit to the awe-inspiring Mogao Buddha Caves in the morning. We will then have a free afternoon to explore this amazing town and its surroundings - there are possibilities for camel rides along the sand dunes and bicycle rides out to the nearby White Goose Pagoda!

Day 29 - Turpan (30th August 2021)

Today we will have an early start and a big drive to the oasis town of Turpan.

Please note that due to the political tension in Western China there are many police checkpoints that we must go through to show our passports in the Xinjiang province. Sometimes it may be preferred by the group and the leader to split this drive over 2 days, finding a local hotel in between to break up the travel day.

Day 30 - Turpan (31st August 2021)

Today we will have a free day to explore the surrounding sites including the famous Jiaohe ruins.

Day 31 - Urumqi (1st September 2021)

Today we will continue on to Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang province.

Day 32 - Urumqi (2nd September 2021)

On the second day we will have an included visit to Heavenly Lake to enjoy the incredible scenery in the Tian Shan Mountains and walk around the lake.

Day 33 - Korle (3rd September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today our journey continues westwards through the Taklamakan Desert. Our crossing of the desert usually takes 3 days/2 nights, and we plan to stay in local hotels near Korla or Bayanbulak on our first night and Aksu on our second.

Day 34 - Aksu (4th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

On our second day travelling through the Taklamakan Desert, we plan to stay the night near Aksu.

Day 35 - Kashgar (5th September 2021)

Today we complete our journey to the far west of China, arriving in Kashgar, once one of the ancient trading posts on the Silk Route!

Day 36 - Kashgar (6th September 2021)

We will spend 3 nights in Kashgar, during which time there will be lots of opportunity to explore the city and its central Id Kah Mosque. We will also have an included visit to the animal market just outside of town, and then the famous Kashgar Sunday Bazaar.

Day 37 - Kashgar (7th September 2021)

We have a free day in Kashgar for optional activities.

Day 38 - Kashgar (8th September 2021)

For everyone that is continuing with us to Kyrgyzstan, there will be quick pre-departure meeting in the early morning in order to explain the next 6 days until Bishkek, and your leader will collect the kitty for this linking section.

In the afternoon we will do an included visit to Shiptons Arch - the largest natural arch in the world!

Tonight we will stay in a good quality local hotel

Day 39 - Tash Rabat (9th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Border Information: Exit China at Torugart, enter Kyrgyzstan at Torugart.

Today we will have a full day drive over the 3752m Torugart Pass into the magical mountain kingdom of Kyrgyzstan! We will head just over the border to Tash Rabat, once a key staging post on the Silk Road close to the Kyrgyzstan-China border. During our time here we will visit an ancient caravanserai and have some time to explore the surrounding area.

In Tash Rabat we will wild camp. In cold weather (or if simply the group prefers and there is availability), we may choose to stay in local nomadic yurts that are set up for guests near the caravanserai, sleeping 8-10 people per yurt.

We will spend 2 nights in Tash Rabat. On the second day we will have time to explore the local area.

Estimated Drive Time - 5-6 hours.

Day 40 - Tash Rabat (10th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

We will spend 2 nights in Tash Rabat. On the second day we will have time to explore the local area.

Day 41 - Kochkor (11th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today we drive to the small village of Kochkor, where we stay in local family-run guesthouses 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. We may also have the opportunity here to see some excellent local musicians playing traditional Kyrgyz folk music and to see how a yurt is put up!

In Kochkor we will stay in family-run guesthouses, accommodating up to 8 guests in each home.

Estimated Drive Time - 4-5 hours.

Please note that if nobody from this group is leaving in Bishkek, we may choose to stay instead in a guesthouse in the small town of Naryn (a 2-3 hour drive from Tash Rabat). This is so that we don't repeat Kochkor unnecessarily on the next section and can have more time to explore the area of Tash Rabat this morning.

Day 42 - Bishkek (12th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we have a short drive to Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. The remainder of the day is free to explore the relaxed and atmospheric city.

In Bishkek we will stay in a comfortable hotel with good facilities.

Estimated Drive Time - 3-4 hours (from Kochkor).

Day 43 - Bishkek (13th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Border Information: if joining in Bishkek, you will most likely enter Kyrgyzstan at Bishkek Manas International Airport (IATA code: FRU).

There will be a pre-departure meeting at 10:00am - please look out for a note from your leader at the reception of the joining hotel upon arrival with more details about this important meeting. Your leader will need to carefully check your visas at this initial meeting.

The rest of the day is free for you to explore this relaxed and atmospheric city.

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

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.

Another important note - please be aware that all itineraries in Kyrgyzstan are highly weather-dependent. The itinerary described in these notes are a statement of best intention, but we must approach each trip in Kyrgyzstan with a large degree of flexibility, as our leaders and local guides will have to 'play things by ear' according to the local conditions and weather. In low season certain routes become impossible and it may become far too cold to camp - in all cases there are fantastic and well-tried alternatives in place which means we can always run an excellent and comprehensive trip here, but please do not treat the exact details of the itinerary listed here as gospel - thanks for your understanding!

Day 44 - Chong Kemin Valley (14th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we will begin our journey to Chong Kemin National Park, where we will have free time to explore and hike in this beautiful area, or to get involved in an optional white water rafting excursion.

In Chong Kemin we will wild camp. If it is too cold or simply preferred by the group, we may choose to camp in the grounds of a guesthouse in Ashu, a village in the Chong Kemin valley, where there could be the possibility to upgrade to rooms.

Day 45 - Chong Kemin Valley (15th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

We will have a free day to explore and hike in this stunning area today or perhaps get involved in an optional white water rafting excursion!

Day 46 - Karakol (16th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we will drive to the northern shore of Lake Issyk K l and visit the ancient petroglyphs at Cholpon Ata. We will then continue to the Russian-style town of Karakol, where we will have a free evening to explore and relax!

Day 47 - Jeti-Oguz Valley (17th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we drive up into the mountains to the alpine trekking region of Jeti Oguz.

Please note that on trips in the low season we may not be able to camp in Jeti Oguz due to low temperatures. If this is the case, we will take a stunning and incredible drive up a mountain in a Russian 4x4 truck to Altyn Arashan, a hot spring development in a stunning alpine setting, staying in dormitory accommodation. We will then stay for 1 night in a local hotel at the base of Jeti Oguz Valley (allowing time for some day walks).

Day 48 - Jeti-Oguz Valley (18th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

We will have a 2nd night here in Jeti Oguz with a chance to hike in the incredible scenery here, or take an optional horse ride with some of the local nomads.

Day 49 - Kochkor (19th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

This morning we will drive to the small village of Kochkor, where we stay in local family-run guesthouses and enjoy traditional Kyrgyz hospitality! En route we will have an included demonstration from a local 'eagle hunter'.

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. We may also have the opportunity here to see some excellent local musicians playing traditional Kyrgyz folk music and to see how a yurt is put up!

Day 50 - Son-Kol Lake (20th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Today we will drive to the incredible Song K l Lake, where we will spend the next two nights.

We will have free time here to explore the area, and to enjoy some optional activities including hiking or horse-riding!

Please note that trips during the low season will not be able to visit Song K l Lake, as temperatures will be below freezing, the road will be snowed over, and there will be no yurts to stay in! Instead we will likely stay in yurts on the southern shore of Lake Issyk K l.

Day 51 - Son-Kol Lake (21st September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

On our 2nd day in Song Kul Lake we have free time to explore the area, and to enjoy some optional activities including hiking or horse-riding!

Day 52 - Kyrgyz Fergana Valley (22nd September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

We will spend the next 3 days overlanding through the stunning and remote Kyrgyz Fergana Valley, stopping often to admire the views and perhaps take some impromptu hikes in the hills and countryside.

During these days we plan to wild camp en route. Please note that trips running in low season (May to mid-June and October to November), we may not be able to camp if temperatures are too low, in which case we will stay in local guesthouses along the route instead.

Day 53 - Kyrgyz Fergana Valley (23rd September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

We will have another day of scenic driving as we make our way to our second wild camp near Toktugal Lake

Day 54 - Arslanbob (24th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we will complete our drive to Arslanbob in Kyrgyzstan's Fergana Valley - if we have had a slow journey in the previous days with lots of stops, we may choose to stay in the closer town of Jalalabad instead.

Day 55 - Arslanbob (25th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we have a free day to explore the local area. There will be options to do an all day hike to a big waterfall or alternatively do an optional horseride through the Walnut Forest

Day 56 - Fergana Valley (26th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

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

Today we will have a full day's drive across the Uzbek border to the eastern city of Fergana.

Day 57 - Tashkent (27th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

This morning we travel in local transport to Kokand, where we will have the opportunity to visit the Khudayar Khan's Palace and the nearby Margilan Silk Factory before completing the journey over the Kamchik Pass to Tashkent, the Uzbek capital.

The truck must pass over the Kamchik Pass without passengers and will rejoin us this evening in Tashkent.

Day 58 - Tashkent (28th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Border Information: if joining in Tashkent, you will most likely enter Uzbekistan at Tashkent International Airport (IATA code: TAS).

There will be a pre-departure meeting at 10:00am - please look out for a note from your leader at the reception of the joining hotel upon arrival with more details about this important meeting. Your leader will need to carefully check your visas at this initial meeting.

We will then have a free afternoon to explore the Uzbek capital of Tashkent.

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

Important note - any tobacco products are practically illegal in Turkmenistan, so please do not bring them or use them in Turkmenistan. Also 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.

Day 59 - Samarkand (29th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today our journey begins with a drive to the fascinating ancient city of Samarkand, where we will stay for the next 3 nights.

Day 60 - Samarkand (30th September 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we will have a guided tour of the incredible historic city of Samarkand and the surrounding area, including the Registan, Ulug Beg Observatory, Bibi-Khanym Mosque and Shah-I-Zinda.

Day 61 - Samarkand (1st October 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

We will have a free day today with the chance to wander the streets and delve into this beautiful city and its history further.

Day 62 - Kyzylkhum Desert (2nd October 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we will drive into the Kyzylkhum Desert near the town of Nurata. In the afternoon we will have the opportunity to take a swim in Lake Ajdar Kul and head out on an optional camel ride into the desert!

Day 63 - Bukhara (3rd October 2021)

Today we will drive to the beautiful city of Bukhara, where we will spend the next 3 nights. Our drive will take us via the desert town of Nurata, which we will have a brief stop.

Day 64 - Bukhara (4th October 2021)

Today we will have a guided tour of Bukhara and the surrounding area, including the Ismail Samani Mausoleum, Kalon Mosque, Zindon Prison and the Ark Fortress.

Day 65 - Bukhara (5th October 2021)

Spend the day exploring this incredible historic city and its surroundings further and soaking up the atmosphere.

Day 66 - Khiva (6th October 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we have a full day drive to the incredible historic town of Khiva.

Day 67 - Khiva (7th October 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

After breakfast we have a guided tour of the ancient city of Khiva. In the afternoon we will have plenty of free time to further explore this wonderfully preserved Khanate town.

Day 68 - Kunye Urgench (8th October 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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

This morning we will drive across the border into Turkmenistan, visit the markets in the border town of Dashoguz, and explore the Kunye Urgench ruins towards the end of the day.

Day 69 - Darvaza (9th October 2021)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Today we continue south through the Karakum Desert. We will have an included side trip to the amazing flaming Darvaza Gas Crater (also known as the 'Door to Hell!').

We will wild camp in the deserts near Darvaza Crater tonight.

Day 70 - Ashgabat (10th October 2021)

Meals: Breakfast

Today we will complete our drive to the interesting capital of Ashgabat, usually arriving mid-afternoon.

Day 71 - Ashgabat (11th October 2021)

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.

Day 72 - Turkmenbashi (12th October 2021)

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.

Day 73 - Caspian Sea (13th October 2021)

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.

Day 74 - Baku (14th October 2021)

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 75 - Baku (15th October 2021)

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

Day 76 - Baku (16th October 2021)

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. **

Day 77 - Baku (17th October 2021)

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

Day 78 - Lahij Village (18th October 2021)

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

Day 79 - Sheki (19th October 2021)

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 80 - Lagodekhi (20th October 2021)

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 Lagodekhi National Park shortly after crossing the border.

Day 81 - Telavi (21st October 2021)

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.

Day 82 - Telavi (22nd October 2021)

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.

Day 83 - Stepantsminda (23rd October 2021)

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 84 - Mtskheta (24th October 2021)

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 85 - Borjomi-Kharagauli NP (25th October 2021)

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 86 - Armenian Highlands (26th October 2021)

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 87 - Yerevan (27th October 2021)

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 88 - Yerevan (28th October 2021)

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

Day 89 - Lake Sevan (29th October 2021)

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 90 - Tbilisi (30th October 2021)

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.

Day 91 - Kutaisi (31st October 2021)

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.

Day 92 - Batumi (1st November 2021)

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

Day 93 - Sumela (2nd November 2021)

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 94 - Zara (3rd November 2021)

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 95 - Goreme (4th November 2021)

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.

Day 96 - Goreme (5th November 2021)

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.

Day 97 - Egirdir (6th November 2021)

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 98 - Olympos (7th November 2021)

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.

Day 99 - Olympos (8th November 2021)

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.

Day 100 - Pamukkale (9th November 2021)

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.

Day 101 - Selcuk (10th November 2021)

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 102 - Selcuk (11th November 2021)

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

Day 103 - Gallipoli (12th November 2021)

After breakfast we will leave Selcuk and drive to Helsik 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.

Day 104 - Istanbul (13th November 2021)

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.

Day 105 - Istanbul (14th November 2021)

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.

ALTITUDE WARNING

Warning - this trip goes above 2800m.

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 [download our AMS information sheet](#) or refer to the following website: www.high-altitude-medicine.com. If you are starting your trip in a destination above 2800m/9200ft we strongly advise reading this information prior to arrival. 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.

Some travel insurance companies will stipulate a maximum altitude limit. Please ensure that you are covered and if necessary pay the additional premium of extended cover.

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 to 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-psychotropic-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 cooperate 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.

CHINA NOTES

KYRGYZSTAN NOTES

KYRGYZSTAN 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 too cold to visit Song K l Lake or camp (May to mid June, October and November) we will run an 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 known as Altyn Arashan.

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

In general, the summer months (June, July and August) can be warm during the day but temperatures can drop to 0 C at night. For this reason we recommend taking warm clothes and a warm sleeping bag for ALL trips in Kyrgyzstan. For trips that run during the colder months (May to mid June and September to October/November) we recommend you bring extra warm clothing and an all-season sleeping bag as it is not uncommon for temperatures to fall to -10C, sometimes colder.

We recommend you check local average weather conditions for each country you will be travelling to in order to properly prepare for your trip.

UZBEKISTAN NOTES

TURKMENISTAN NOTES

TURKMENISTAN NOTE

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 29th November 2020**