

ASHGABAT to BISHKEK (46 days) Kyrgyzstan Overland & Silk Road Highlights -copy

Country(ies): Kazakhstan , Kyrgyzstan , Tajikistan ,
Turkmenistan , Uzbekistan

Tour type: Overland Adventure

Transport: All transport on Oasis Expedition Truck

Group size: Min: 16 | Max: 24

Days: 46 days

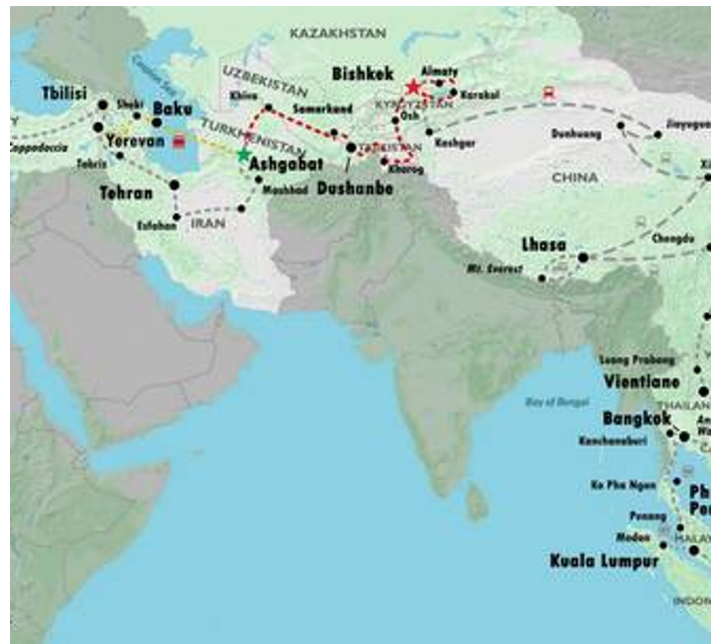
Start Location: Ashgabat

End Location: Bishkek

Meals: Breakfasts - 0, Lunches - 0, Dinners - 0

Highlights:

- Feel the intense heat coming from the Darwaza Gas Crater
- See ships marooned in the desert at the Aral Sea
- Explore the ancient medressas, mausoleums and mosques in Khiva, Bukhara and Samarkand
- Driving through and hiking in the scenic Fann Mountains
- Soak in the atmosphere of colourful oriental bazaars and majestic fortresses in Dushanbe
- Stunning journey through Tajikistan's Pamir Highway enjoying its High Peaks and Alpine Lakes
- Visit the oldest bazaar in Central Asia in the city of Osh
- Explore the cliffs and trails in Charyn Canyon



- Overnight stay in a Traditional yurt at Altyn Arashan and Lake Song Kol
- Enjoy the stunning mountain scenery, cliff formations and alpine lakes throughout Kyrgyzstan
- Swim in Lake Issyk-Kul, the world's second largest Alpine lake

Itinerary

Days 1: Ashgabat

You can plan to arrive in Ashgabat anytime today. We will arrange for a local representative to meet you in the airport and transfer you to our hotel close by. The truck should arrive sometime late this afternoon, either from Iran or from western Turkmenistan depending on the route we have taken up to now.

If your flights arrive before today, then you will need to book any extra nights required through us, as these all need to be registered and booked through our local representative and recorded on your visa invitation letter (which we will arrange for you).

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Days 2: Ashgabat

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

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

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Days 3 - 4: Ashgabat to Kunye Urgench

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

Rising early the next morning we leave Darwaza and return to the highway as we continue north to Kunye

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

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Days 5 - 9: Kunye Urgench to Bukhara

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

Continuing further into Uzbekistan, we find well preserved relics from the time when Asia was a centre of empire, learning, and trade along the famous Silk Road. Some of its cities have abundant old architecture, mosques and minarets cloaked with the mystery of the orient dating back thousands of years.

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

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

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Days 10 - 13: Bukhara to Samarkand

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

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

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

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

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Days 14 - 18: Samarkand to the Fann Mountains and Dushanbe

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

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

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Days 19 - 26: Dushanbe to the Pamir Highway and Osh

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

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

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Days 27 - 29: Osh to Bishkek

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

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Days 30 - 31: Bishkek

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

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

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Days 32 - 35: Bishkek to Almaty and the Charyn Canyon

We leave Bishkek and head north east to Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest metropolis and capital until 1997. Almaty is the largest and most ethnically and culturally diverse city in Kazakhstan. Set in the foothills of the Trans Lli Alatau mountains, the area has a ski resort (Shymbulak) at an elevation of 2,200 mtrs and enjoys a great amount of snow from November through to May. The city has many sights and attractions, including Ascension Cathedral in Panfilov Park; Abay Opera House; Golden Warrior Monument in the Republic Square and the giant Almaty Tower. Or for adrenaline lovers, why not ride the 'Fast Coaster' roller coaster, that is located on the side of a mountain and reaches speeds of 45 km per hour.

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

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Days 36 - 41: Charyn Canyon to Lake Issyk Kul

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

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

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

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

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

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Days 42 - 45: Lake Song Kul, and back to Bishkek

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

Leaving the beautiful mountain scenery behind us reluctantly, we head back Bishkek with a stop at the impressive Burana Tower on the way.

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Days 46: Bishkek

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

Bishkek is also home to a number of museums, including the Kyrgyz State Historical Museum and Zoological

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

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: See tour notes

EXTRAS:

Included:

- Accommodation - approx. 80% camping & 20% simple hostels/hostels/homestays
- Arrival airport transfer in Ashgabat
- Turkmenistan Letter of Invitation support and fees
- Darvaza Gas Craters
- Ashgabat city tour
- Yurt Stay at Lake Song Kol
- Traditional eagle hunting display in Kyrgyzstan
- Meals - approx. 50%
- All transport on Oasis Expedition Truck
- Camping and Cooking equipment
- Services of Oasis Crew

Excluded:

- Visas
- Optional Excursions as listed in the Pre-Departure Information
- Flights
- Airport Taxes & Transfers
- Travel Insurance
- Meals - approx. 50%
- Drinks
- Tips

Options

Our tours are designed to include all that you need to enjoy a really special time in the destination you're visiting. However, we do also offer some extra options to complement the tour and add some additional sightseeing or activities, or some extra time at either end of the tour.

All accommodation based options (e.g. Single supplements, extra nights, cruise upgrades) should be booked and paid for in advance so that we can make the appropriate arrangements. Other options may either be booked and paid for in advance or while you are on the tour, though we recommend booking in advance to ensure there are no issues with availability.

Many options are priced the same throughout the year, but some may incur single or high season supplements - full details are given on the tour reservation form or on request.

No Options

1. Booking & Payment

If you would like to book a place on this tour, please complete the online reservation form on our website (via the Dates & Prices tab on the tour page). You may make a deposit or full payment online, or just hold a reservation if you prefer (full payments are due 8 weeks before departure). We will then contact you with more details about how to complete your booking. Payments may be made by debit or credit card (subject to a card processing fee), or by making a bank transfer, or posting us a cheque/bank draft. Full details will be provided in your booking confirmation email. Please [contact us](#) if you would like any more information or have any questions before making a booking.

2. Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and are committed to providing our customers with financial protection to provide peace of mind and to allow you to book with confidence.

We have therefore partnered with Trust My Travel Ltd., which provides financial protection services to over 2000 partners around the world. Funds paid to us by our customers are protected via an Insurance policy held by Trust My Travel. Each traveller and the description of services sold is declared against Trust My Travel's insurance policy directly against our financial failure. In the event of our insolvency, you will be refunded for any unfulfilled products and/or repatriation to the UK (where applicable). Please see [our website](#) or [booking conditions](#) for more information.

3. Responsible Tourism

It is impossible not to have an impact on the local environment, cultures and eco-systems when you travel. However, it is very possible to try and ensure that these impacts are as limited, or positive as possible. We are committed to ensuring that we try to leave our host countries in a better state than we found them and encourage and assist our travellers to help us with this.

The following are a few simple tips that require very little effort on your part but which will help ensure that any effect you have on the locations you visit is positive rather than negative.

- Don't prejudge: Things in different countries will almost certainly be different. That doesn't make them worse or inferior, just different.
- Communicate: Don't expect locals to speak your language. Take the trouble to learn a few words or phrases of the local language. Don't worry about sounding silly. Most locals are patient and accommodating and appreciate you making the effort to communicate in their language.
- Conserve energy: Be careful not to waste valuable resources. Use local resources sparingly. Switch off lights, air-conditioning and fans when you leave the hotel room and don't waste water. Remove superfluous packaging. Many countries have far less efficient waste disposal systems than ours. Remove packaging from newly acquired items before leaving home.
- Don't litter: No matter how untidy or dirty the country you're travelling in may look to you, avoid littering, as there is no need to add to the environment's stress. Many of the countries we visit have a tough challenge dealing with rubbish and waste. Please consider taking home as much plastic waste as you can (e.g. water bottles).
- Choose environmentally friendly products: By using environmentally friendly (bio degradable) sun creams, shampoos and detergents you can help reduce pollution.
- Respect local customs and traditions: As you are a guest in these countries, you should also comply with the local customs. If you are friendly and well mannered, the locals will reciprocate and it will only enhance your experience. It's important to follow dress and behaviour guidelines especially when visiting religious or sacred sites (your tour leader will advise you how best to do this).
- If a client commits an illegal act the client may be excluded from the tour and Encounters Travel shall cease to have responsibility to/for them. No refund will be given for any unused services.

All porters are employed and equipped following guidelines set by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

4. Follow Us Online

You can stay in touch with us online by following us on Facebook and Twitter. We post updates on relevant travel news in our destination countries, special offers and discounts and other interesting travel related news and information.

www.facebook.com/encounterstravel

<https://x.com/encounterstravel> (yes, without the 'e')

5. Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory on all of our tours and needs to cover personal accident & liability, medical expenses and repatriation, travel delay & abandonment. We also strongly recommend that you take out cover against cancellation and lost/stolen baggage. Personal medical insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover and is generally not suitable for travel on our tours. You will not be able to join your tour if you have not provided us with details of your insurance or if you arrive without cover in place (no refunds will be due in this event).

Considering travel insurance for your trip? [World Nomads Travel Insurance](#) offers coverage for more than 150 adventure activities as well as emergency medical, lost luggage, trip cancellation and more.

If your tour includes car hire, or if you plan to arrange a hot air balloon flight locally or do some scuba diving during your tour, you should check the small print in your policy to make sure these are covered (these are covered in our policy). Please also check the maximum altitude that you will be reaching and that full cover including emergency evacuation is provided up to this altitude.

If you are taking expensive camera gear or other electronic equipment with you then please check the coverage and the fine print of your policy to ensure that you have sufficient cover.

IMPORTANT: We must have your travel insurance details (policy number and type of insurance) before you depart or you may not be allowed to join the tour. If you haven't told us already, please let us know the details when you can. You should take a paper copy of your insurance policy with you as you may be asked to show this at the start of the tour.

Covid-19

Before purchasing any travel insurance, please check the coverage provided for situations related to Covid-19, and for the rules about government travel advice. Your normal policy may not be suitable.

6. Before you travel

It is important when considering and preparing to travel anywhere in the world that you have a good understanding of the country you are visiting, its laws and customs, and the possible risks and situations that may occur. This includes specific risks related to your itinerary (eg. does it involve water & can you swim, are you fit enough for the activities included), as well as more general risks such as terrorism and natural disasters.

General details and links to more information about health risks, visa requirements, money, and travel insurance are given in these tour notes. We recommend that you re-read all these before your departure as well as the small print of your travel insurance policy so you know exactly what is covered and what is not.

You should take copies of your important travel documents with you and ideally also store them online securely as a backup. Make sure that you have given us your emergency contact details and told that person where and when you are travelling. Ensure you take enough money with you and that you have access to emergency funds.

Finally, you should read through and stay updated with the current [official government travel advice](#) for your destination. We are registered partners with the UK Foreign Office's ['Travel Aware' campaign](#) which provides further useful and invaluable information.

7. Reduce Plastic Waste with Water-to-Go Filter bottles

Traveling responsibly means minimizing plastic waste, but staying hydrated on the go is essential. At Encounters Travel we are committed to reducing single-use plastics, which is why we've partnered with Water-to-Go. Their portable filtration system removes over 99.9% of contaminants from any non-saltwater source, turning even questionable water sources into safe drinking water.

Given that tap water is un-safe to drink in many of the countries in which we operate, we recommend purchasing a Water-to-Go bottle prior to departure. This will help you avoid the use of single use plastic bottles and keep you hydrated on the go.

Save big! Get a huge 25% off your Water-to-Go bottle and other Water-to-Go products (such as filters, lids, and carriers). Use code **ENCOUNTERS25** at checkout (valid in the UK, USA and Canada).

How Water-to-Go Technology works:

- Their reusable, BPA free water bottles contain their own unique 3-in-1 filtration technology effectively providing clean safe drinking water from any non-salt water source around the world.
- Three different (1 traditional and 2 nano) technologies are combined in one filter cartridge to remove up to 99.9999% of microbiological contaminants in water.

The three technologies used in a Water-to-Go filter are:

- Mechanical filtration – A tiny pore size, so small contaminants can't fit through.
- Electrical – A positive charge reduces the pore size even further and attracts contaminants like a magnet, trapping them inside the filter.
- Activated Carbon – Unlike most carbon based filters, instead of using adhesives to glue the carbon particles together, (which vastly reduces the carbon's efficiency) it is contained within the membrane, helping to reduce contaminants whilst eliminating bad tastes and odours. Try filtering water from your tap at home and taste the difference!

Water-to-Go filter bottles deliver safe, healthy water worldwide

- Water-to-Go filters remove bacteria, viruses, waterborne disease, protozoa, heavy metals such as lead as well as harmful chemicals.
- Their filters remove Chlorine and Fluoride from tap water.
- The filter will eliminate harmful contaminants from the water but allow beneficial minerals such as sodium and magnesium to pass through leaving you with the healthiest water possible.
- Water-to-Go filters have been independently tested against internationally recognised standards by industry specialists including The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (UK), BCS Laboratories (USA), Bangalore Test House (India) and IMI (China).

Use Water-to-Go products and you'll be healthier, wealthier and helping to make the world a better place!

- Depending on filter size, each Water-to-Go filter is able to replace 260 or 400 single-use plastic water bottles!
 - They ensure you have access to safe water anywhere in the world without ever having to buy environmentally damaging bottled water.
 - Their water bottles deliver safe, clean drinking water at just 5p per litre.
 - The filter membrane is biodegradable and the shrouds are recyclable.
 - The water bottles are used and approved by everyone from backpackers to commuters, gym users to expecting mums. Perfect for everyday, outdoor and travel.
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8. Private & Tailor-made Tours

While our group departures offer a fantastic way to explore with like-minded travellers, we understand that some guests prefer a more exclusive experience. Most of our group tours can be booked on a private basis, allowing you to enjoy the same expert-led routes with your own dedicated party. The primary advantage of choosing a private arrangement is the flexibility it provides; we can easily customise the itinerary to include your preferred style of accommodation or adjust the pace to suit your needs. Private tours can be run on the same start days as our group tours, or on other dates. However, some activities within our trips are restricted to particular days of the week - we will advise you on anything like this that we need to work around. Pricing will be based on the number of travellers in your party, and any customisations you may like to make.

For those seeking something truly unique, our specialist sales team is available to collaborate with you on a completely tailor-made tour, designed from the ground up to match your specific interests, accommodation level and requirements.

To request a quotation for a private or tailor-made tour, please [contact us](#).

Printed on: Thursday 21st of May 2026

Note: Please [download an up-to-date copy](#) of these tour notes shortly before you travel as itineraries and information does change from time to time.
