EXPLORE! Tour Notes

PRICE GUARANTEE 100% NO SURCHARGES

Southern Oasis Cycling (CSO 2015)

CYCLING

TOURDURAT
8
DAYS

Tour Style: Classic
Tour Comfort: Standard
Tour Type: Small Groups
Cycling Grade: Moderate
tour Code: CSO

Tour Highlights - Southern Oasis Cycling

- ✓ Draa Valley - Cycle through one of the most picturesque valleys in Morocco
- ✓ Erg Chebbi - Ride camels through impressive Saharan sand dunes and camp overnight in a desert wilderness
- ✓ Tizi N'Fedrhate Pass - Enjoy a thrilling descent from this stunning mountain pass in the High Atlas
- ✓ Marrakech - Discover Morocco's vibrant Red City, with its atmospheric medina and lively Djemma-el-Fna Square

Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	6 nights Standard Hotel 1 night Basic Camping
Included Meals:	7 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 1 dinner
Start Point:	Join tour: Marrakech
End Point:	Tour ends: Marrakech
Included Bike:	21 gear Stockli XC mountian bikes with front suspension.
Transport:	Minibus, Bicycle
Countries:	Morocco

Southern Oasis Cycling

Surrounded by the Jebel Sahro mountain range, we cycle through kasbahs, tribal villages and cool oases in the Draa Valley. We trek by camel to a nomad desert camp in the Sahara, explore one of the world's most impressive canyons, Todra Gorge, and ride through remote Berber heartland in the High Atlas.

Why Book this tour

Unlike many other operators, we include the hire of your bike in the overall cost of the holiday: you don't need to bring your own or pay extra to hire one locally. We also provide a support vehicle, spare parts and take care of day to day bike maintenance. All you need bring is your own helmet.

Cycling Information

On this tour we cycle 219 km over five days (an average of 44 km a day). The terrain is mainly flat or downhill on tarmac roads as we use a bus to drive the steeper sections. We have graded the route as moderate.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Tour Comfort: Standard

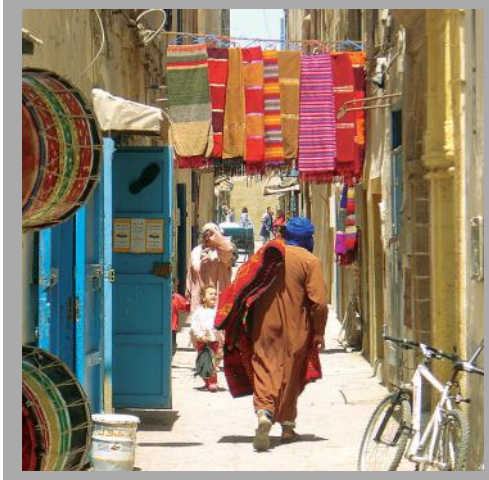
Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Cycling Grade: Moderate

Medium length rides are suitable for cyclists who are used to undulating routes with occasional energetic climbs. You'll be cycling mainly on trails and quiet roads and you should have a reasonable level of fitness.



Your tour itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

Your Tour Leader

A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced tour leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are

passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and organisation throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

DAY 1 Join tour Marrakech

We join our tour in vibrant Marrakech. For centuries the meeting place for the mountain Berbers and the desert people of the south, it is divided into two distinct parts - Gueliz (the modern French-built city) and the old medina. The city's beating heart is the lively Djemma-el-Fna square - alive with storytellers, musicians, jugglers and snake charmers. At sunset, dozens of food stalls are energetically set up for the evening trade, selling everything from snails and sheep heads to broths and tagines.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available **Swimming Pool Available**

Included Meals: None

DAY 2 Explore Marrakech; drive High Atlas pass to Ouarzazate

This morning, we have some time to visit the souks and sites of the medina before our drive to the garrison town of Ouarzazate - gateway to the Sahara Desert. Our journey takes us over the dramatic High Atlas pass of Tizi n' Tichka, at an altitude of 2,260 metres. En route, we plan to visit the spectacular fortified city of Ait Benhaddou - classified a UNESCO World Heritage Site and considered by many as one of Morocco's most picturesque settings. Richly decorated and studded with crenelated towers, the town's spectacular kasbah may be recognised from scenes in Jesus of Nazareth, Lawrence of Arabia, Gladiator and, most recently, Game of Thrones. We spend the night in Ouarzazate and prepare for tomorrow's cycling journey.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available **Swimming Pool Available**

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3 Cycling in the Draa Valley, then drive to Alnif

Leaving Ouarzazate by bus, we drive over the dramatic Tizi n'Tinififft mountain pass, rising to an altitude of 1,800 metres amid the lunar landscape of the Anti-Atlas. We continue down into one of the most stunning natural wonders of Morocco - the Draa Valley, where we have the opportunity to enjoy an exhilarating cycle ride. Littered with kasbahs and ksours (fortified villages), the Draa Valley is the largest date palm oasis in Morocco. We begin cycling in the small town of Agdz and head south on descending terrain though lush oases. We will get back into our vehicle for the last part of our journey to our overnight stop at Tazzarine. Our total cycling distance today is approximately 45 kilometres.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available **Swimming Pool Available**

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4 Cycle the foothills of Jebel Sahro; camel trek to camp

This morning, we cycle from our hotel along the southern foothills of the Jebel Sahro mountain range, against the spectacular backdrop of the 2,712 metre Amalou n'Mansour peak. This is a very remote part of Morocco and few cars pass through this vast area of stony hammada desert. Later we drive to Merzouga, from where we will go on an exciting camel trek to explore the contrasting and more stereotypical desert landscape of Erg Chebbi. This spectacular natural wonder is home to the largest expanse of sand in Morocco, with giant dunes peaking at an impressive 150 metres. In actual fact, landscapes like this only cover about one fifth of the Sahara's surface, the rest is made up of vast rock and gravel plains. Our camel trek takes us to our desert camp where we will spend the night. This ultimate 'Arabian Nights' experience allows us to experience the unrivalled tranquillity of this desert setting. Mattresses, blankets and pillows are provided and washing facilities, including flushing toilets, are available. Our total cycling distance today is approximately 50 kilometres (200 metre total ascent).

Overnight: **Basic Camping**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 5 Enjoy Sunrise in the sand dunes then pedal to Erfoud

This morning, we recommend rising early to watch the spectacular desert sunrise as it casts shadows across the rolling dunes. After breakfast, we return to Merzouga by camel. A short drive takes us to the start of today's cycle ride in the Rissani region- homeland of the Alaouite dynasty, which reigned in this area for 300 years. Cycling through an expansive desert landscape on mostly flat terrain, we pass palmeries and ksours on our journey to Erfoud - our base for the night. Our total cycling distance today is approximately 35 kilometres.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6 Bike though local villages en route to El Kelaa Mgouna

This morning, we set off on our bikes towards Tinerhir in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains. Passing alongside the ancient 'Fogaras' subterranean irrigation system, our route takes us through a lush oasis, abundant with date palms and olive groves, fruit orchards and almonds trees, all littered amongst a fertile landscape of grain and vegetables. Our bus will pick us up for the last part of our journey to Todra Gorge - renowned as one of the most spectacular canyons in the world. Here, ochre-coloured rock walls rise vertically to a height of 160 meters, leaving just a narrow pass through which the track and river struggle for right of way. We have time to explore these deep, narrow mountain chasms on foot and are likely to see the Berber women drive their goats through the gorge to the better grazing land higher up. We continue our journey by vehicle along the former caravan route between the Sahara and Marrakech to reach our overnight stop in El Kelaa des M'Gouna. Known as the 'town of the roses', it is surrounded by a landscape of scented blooms each spring. These are harvested in May during the famous Festival of the Roses, before being processed into rosewater and sold throughout the Islamic world. Our total cycling distance today is approximately 40 kilometres (200 metre total ascent).

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 7 Ride down the Atlas Mountains and return to Marrakech

After an early breakfast, we drive into the High Atlas to the Tizi n'Fedrhate Pass at an altitude of 2,150 metres. From here, we start cycling down into the northern foothills of the Atlas Mountains, through some of the most dramatic scenery of this entire trip. Amid the silence of the mountain valleys, the hardy Berbers cultivate fields of barley, wheat, olives, figs, beans, peas and almond groves. Here, tradition is strong and social organisation remains uncompromisingly tribal. These 'Lords of the Atlas' present us with a unique view of a way of life lost to the rest of North Africa, where music and dance, even language and religion, are far removed from their Arab neighbours. Later, we get back into our vehicle, returning to Marrakech late in the afternoon. Our total cycling distance today is approximately 49 kilometres (250 metre total ascent). Please note: Today's cycling route may have to be altered in adverse weather conditions.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 8 Tour ends Marrakech

Our tour ends in Marrakech today after breakfast. Depending on the time of your flight, you might be able to spend some additional time exploring the city independently.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Accommodation Rating

Standard - Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Basic - Our basic accommodation can offer the most rewarding and memorable places to stay. These are usually communal or camping style with shared facilities. Running hot and cold water may be unreliable and overall comfort levels are basic.

Morocco is a developing country and as such, the accommodation standards are not equivalent to those in Europe and can be more basic. We generally choose our properties because of their location, cleanliness, traditional style or for their welcoming atmosphere, as we endeavour to provide an authentic Moroccan experience. However, some of the properties might have some outdated or simple furniture and the level of service may vary depending on the location. You may find that availability of hot water is variable or limited in certain locations. Breakfasts are generally continental style. A swimming pool is often available, especially in the cities.

Food & Drink

Included meals: 7 breakfasts, 0 lunches,1 dinner included in the price of this tour. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide.Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Morocco

Lunch £: 6.00

Dinner £: 8-10

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Morocco

Bottle of Beer £: 2.50

Water £: 0.60

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Marrakech - Walking tour £6.00, Hammam £5.00.

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly you should allow at least £10 for tipping local crew.

Foreign Exchange

Morocco

ATM Availability: ATMs are available in main towns/cities, though can be unreliable.

Credit Card Acceptance: Not all places.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers cheques are difficult to exchange and are not recommended.

Local Currency: Moroccan Dirham (MAD).

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US Dollars, Sterling and Euros are readily exchangeable. We recommend you take a mixture of cash and credit cards. Scottish bank notes and Australian dollar travellers cheques and cash are NOT normally accepted in Morocco.

Where to Exchange: Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a ‘flight inclusive’ package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the ‘Land Only’ arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific ‘Joining Instructions’ prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of joining any of our tours that you must have valid travel insurance. It must indicate that you have cover for (at least) medical expenses and emergency repatriation in the event of illness or injury. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling in England and Scotland. We also strongly recommend your policy includes curtailment, personal effects and cancellation protection as all deposits paid are non-refundable. You will also need to ensure your travel policy covers you for all activities you intend to do whilst on tour.

We are delighted to include FREE travel insurance **for all qualifying customers** who book an Explore trip from 01 January 2015.

For more information about Travel insurance and to check whether you are eligible to receive free cover, please visit www.explore.co.uk/insurance. Explore Worldwide Ltd are an Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Limited. who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. The registration number can be checked by visiting the the FCA's website www.fca.gov.uk or by contacting them on 0800 111 6768.

Visa Information

Morocco: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

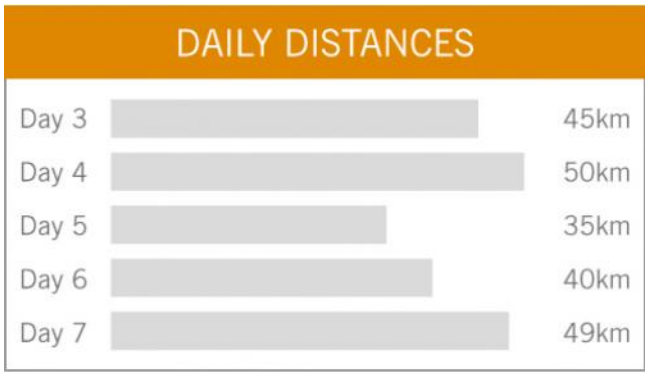
All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

Vaccinations & Protection

Morocco

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against tetanus, typhoid, infectious hepatitis and polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria.

Preparing for your Tour



Bike Details

Your included bike is a 21 gear Stockli XC mountain bike with front suspension and will be the correct frame size for your height. A bike bag and water bottle holder are included as well as the facility to fit your own saddle if you wish to bring them. 2-Way pedals are provided and are therefore suitable for either normal or SPD shoes. A support vehicle accompanies the rides throughout the tour. We provide spare parts and take care of the day to day maintenance. All you need to bring is your own helmet.

Climate

Morocco

The climate is both Mediterranean and Atlantic. The dry, hot season is from May to October when summer temperatures can reach 38°C and above (if sight seeing is included we will do our best to avoid the heat of the day during this period). Temperatures may drop significantly at times during the night as the day's heat rapidly diminishes. From December to January snow can be expected on mountain passes and it can be wet. In winter, day temperatures will probably be around 18-25°C, dropping to perhaps 0-5°C.

Clothing

We recommend you bring padded cycle shorts and quick drying cycle shirts for the daily cycling. Soaked cotton clothes tend not to dry while cycling. Cycling gloves are strongly recommended as they will protect you from sunburn and may also help protect your hands if you fall.

Evenings and nights can become quite cold between October and March. It is advisable to take warm clothing (e.g. track suit or thermal underwear) to sleep in, as the quality of heating in Moroccan hotel rooms can be variable. Keep in mind that at altitude and in the desert, temperatures can drop rapidly, so a warm sweater or fleece, plus waterproof/windproof shell garment, hat and gloves are essential. Don’t forget your swimming costume in the warmer months.

Morocco is a Muslim country and it is important to dress with respect for local customs. People may be offended by shorts or revealing dresses, which can attract unwelcome attention. We advise that in general both men and women should cover shoulders, upper arms and knees. Transparent, ‘plunging’ necklines and tightfitting clothes should be avoided. Women should also cover their heads when entering a sanctuary, though in general, mosques are forbidden to non-Muslims. For those clients on a cycling holiday please bear this information in mind for times that you are not on the bikes. While cycling it is no problem for both men and women to wear your regular cycling gear, tight fitting or not.

Equipment

We recommend you bring your own helmet. Bring a water-bottle that clips on to the bike. Wrap-around sunglasses help prevent insects or pollen getting in your eyes. A penknife is useful for picnic lunches. For additional comfort you may like to bring a gel seat cover. A torch is also useful.

Please consider carrying all or some of your cycling equipment, e.g. helmet, as part of your hand luggage.

Camping Equipment Provided

Please note that for the desert camping thick mattresses, blankets and sheets are provided for you. In the winter months between November and March you may consider bringing a sleeping bag to supplement the blankets provided as night temperatures can be very cold.

Footwear

Lightweight walking shoes/trainers for cycling. Comfortable shoes/sandals for evenings and visiting the sites and towns.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Total allowance: 44lb/20kg. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Luggage allowance on tour: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Morocco

Population: 32,000,000

Size of Country: 446,550 sq km

Major Language: Arabic, Berber, French.

Religion: Muslim

Electric Supply & Plugs

Morocco

2 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailormade holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, elephant, or any number of unusual forms of transport . Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Our commitment to the environment

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures and traditional, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people), Dekamer (a turtle rescue centre in Turkey) and Kids Saving the Rainforest (a wildlife rescue centre in Costa Rica supported through the LATA foundation). We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation and Friends of Conservation.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

- The Travel Foundation

  Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
- Tourism Concern

  Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- For further information on responsible travel go to http://www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/

Know before you go

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety andÂ security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. ForÂ UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link atÂ http://www.explore.co.uk/essential-travel-information/travel-resources/travel-safety

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's LicenceÂ granted by the Civil Aviation Authority.Â Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2014 and 31st December 2015.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2015 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2015. 2016/17 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2016.

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