

Predeparture information

Preparing to go



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Documents

In no way will Gateway to Asia be responsible for clients who are refused entry to a country due to the lack the proper documents.

Passports

In order to enter any country you will require a passport valid for at least 6 months beyond the date you complete your travels. While checking into hotels in some countries you will need to produce your passport. It is also required while you are buying air tickets and while exchanging currencies. In case your passport has only a few months validity or only a few pages remaining, it is advisable to apply for a new one before you embark on your journey and if you apply for a new passport, make sure that you well before your date for departure. We also recommend that you take also take a photocopy of details of your passport which includes your passport number, visa number and place and the date of issue. This information must be kept separate from your passport. In case you lost your passport please report it at once to your tour leader, the police and the nearest embassy or the consulate of your country.

Visas

Requirements to obtain the visa of the country you are traveling differ at different countries. They also differ according to nationality. You must have the visas that are required to enter the country you travel. It is always better to obtain the visa in advance.

Although there are some countries which provide visas upon arrival but they can be time consuming and incase there are some problems with your passport, you may not be allowed one. Therefore, it is advisable that you get a visa well in advance. The validity of visas is usually for a limited period. If you have applied for a visa well in advance please make sure that your visa may still be valid during your stay in a particular country.

You should also be aware that most visas are only valid for a limited period of time from the date of issue. If you are applying for your visa a long way in advance of your planned entry into the country, make sure that the visa will still be valid on the date of your arrival and for the duration of your visit. Be aware that whilst a few embassies and consulates will issue visas the same day or within 48 hours, it is more usual for visa applications to take several days, sometimes even weeks. Be very cautious about applying for visas by post. Postal applications tend to be given the lowest priority of all and some embassies have a huge backlog of postal applications. If you make a postal application, we recommend that you send your passport by registered mail special delivery.

Visa Services

A large number of our travelers have found it beneficial to use a specialist 'Visa Service'. As it is their business to obtain visas every day, these companies build up good working relationships with the various embassies and consulates. They are usually able to obtain a visa more quickly than you would and are particularly useful for some of the more awkward visas. Likewise if a destination is not represented in your home country or if you live too far away to visit an embassy in person, a visa service can be invaluable. Visa service companies do charge, but you should weigh this

up against the convenience and time you will save. Please contact your travel agent for details of a suitable visa service.

Check Your Visa

Once your visa has been issued, please check if everything is correct. If you have applied for a multiple visa, it becomes more important for you to check it clearly. It should be understood that possessing does not guarantee you entry into a country. The entry at the end depends upon the immigration officer who will check your passport while you arrive in a particular country.

Travel Documents & Vouchers

You will be provided with a confirmation invoice once you have booked a tour with us. Please check if all the services that you have booked for are mentioned in your travel documents. Also make sure that all the names have been spelt correctly. In case you have booked for extra services like pre and post tour accommodations, transfers and excursions; it has to be clearly marked on the confirmation invoice and a voucher has to be issued for such services.

Money

Currency Exchange

There are many ways to carry money overseas. This includes travelers' cheques, credit cards, ATM cards and cash. The most popular one among them all are Travelers' cheques which are secure. However, these can be difficult to change in some countries. You can find more information on this if you check the country fact file of the country that you are traveling to. We recommend that you carry some cash. This can be particularly helpful in remote areas. Prior to your visit, carrying a small amount of the currency of the country you are visiting can be helpful at times. These can be accessible at the Arrivals Hall of the airport which have banking facilities, though you must understand that these may not be open all the time. It is also necessary that you carry some money in the form of small denomination travelers' cheques or cash so that it becomes easy for you to change only the amount you will require. Changing your left over local currency at the end of the trip might become difficult at times.

This is particularly important near the end of your holiday as it is sometimes difficult to change back surplus local currency. Please note that the regional offices of Discover Asia tours does not accept travelers' cheques as payment for services booked while on tour. They can accept recognized credit cards, subject to a minimum transaction of £100 (US\$150).

Currency Declaration Forms

There is a restriction in some countries in bringing or taking out large amounts of money. Therefore you must have to fill in currency exchange documents. Once you have completed such a document, a part of it will be returned back to you. You must not lose this document as this may have to be produced upon departure. In many countries this requirement only applies if you are bringing in a large amount of money.

Carrying sufficient money

It is always better to carry a shade more than what you think would be the actual amount that you require. There are a few insurance policies that will readily provide you with fast money in case there is an emergency.

Safety

While traveling, your safety is our primary concern. We have a strong network of professionals who work hard to ensure your safety and to run everything as smoothly as possible. However, it is always better if you follow a few simple guidelines that maybe useful to you.

Personal

Do not worry too much and just try to have a good time. It is also important that you exercise some caution.

Belongings

Always be careful about your belongings too. It is entirely your responsibility to look after your valuables. Please keep items like cash, travelers' cheques, tickets, passports etc. on your person in a hidden money belt or stored in the hotel safe. Leave all your expensive jewellery at home.

Working out Your Budget

It is extremely difficult to evaluate exactly how much money will be sufficient during your trip but the following will help you identify things to consider when budgeting.

International Flights

The prices that have been listed in the website or on our brochures are for the land content only. In some itineraries, regional and domestic flights have been included. However, International flights have not been included.

Insurance

Insurance is not included in the prices of our tours. However, we follow a strict rule that all of our clients are insured fully for medical expenses that might be required while traveling. Right at the beginning of the tour, the tour leader will ask you to produce your insurance document and will note down the policy number and also the emergency contact number. Your documentation must show confirmation that you are the named policy-holder and that the cover is valid for your period of travel. The documentation must also indicate that you have cover for at least Medical Expenses and Emergency Repatriation. Please make sure that a 24-hour contact telephone number for your Insurance Company is stated on your documentation in case of emergency. If you are unable to provide this information at the start of the trip your tour leader will ask you to purchase an insurance policy.

Tipping

We follow a system of tipping kitty on all of our trips. This saves a lot of requests for tips, which can get annoying at times and also saves embarrassment on the part of travelers. For details on how much to allow for the tipping kitty, check the additional country information on the detailed itinerary section. Each affiliate of the group adds to the Tipping Kitty and this is then used to pay tips to any people who supply services to the group as a whole e.g. guides, porters, drivers, sailors, housekeeping staff in hotels etc. The Tour Leader administers these tips and keeps a detailed record of how the tipping funds are circulated.

Border Taxes

Many countries entail taxes on travelers upon arrival and departure. Sometimes these may be included in the price of your air ticket but not always. If you are entering a country by land you will have to pay border taxes. For details on border taxes, please check out the Additional travel information below the detailed itinerary section.

Entrance Fees

Concessions are available on some entrance fees for holders of some student and youth cards. If you have a card, or are entitled to one, you should bring it along so you can take advantage of any discounts.

Local Payment

There are local payments included in our trips which will have to be paid on day 01 of every tour to the tour leader. This enables us to make the cost of the trip as less as possible. Please check the Additional travel information section for more details on local payments. The local amount has to be paid in full on day 1.

Optional Excursions, Free Time, Meals & Drinks

The additional travel also contains information about other programs like excursions, free time and meal programs.

Arrival Transfer

In most of the trips we have Arrival transfers for travelers arriving on day 1 and also for travelers arriving before day 1. The latter can only be possible if you have booked for extra services with us. You can check out the additional travel information for more details.

Departure Transfer

We do not provide departure transfers. However, you will find it easy to get to the airport yourself with your friends. Moreover, this is going to cost you less than booking with us. You can also take some help from your tour leader who will be more than happy to help you.

Health & Medical Matters

Vaccinations

It is entirely upon you to make sure that you get all that consists of precautionary or preventative medicines for the countries you are visiting. To find about the required vaccinations it would be advisable to visit your doctor at least two months in advance.

Carry Your Certificate

After each vaccination you will be issued with an **International Certificate of Vaccination** for each vaccination. It is essential for you to carry this certificate because the doctors in the different lands will get an overview of your health, in case you get sick.

Diarrhoea

A change of diet may cause some stomach problems in the beginning. You can reduce the possibility of suffering diarrhoea if you treat food and drink with caution – during the early stages of your travels. Seek medical advice or your Tour Leader can assist you with this, if you encounter such problems.

Dehydration

In desert areas and at high altitude, your body can lose a lot of water. Dehydration can also occur when you are suffering from diarrhoea. The best way to stay away from dehydration is to consume plenty of fluids. In most countries you can obtain “rehydration salts” or “electrolyte solution”. Although these do not taste great, they restore the salts lost by your body. You can also make your own rehydration mixture by adding 4 tablespoons of sugar and ½ teaspoon of salt to one liter of clean water.

Sunstroke / Heatstroke

Do not undervalue the strength of the sun – particularly when you are busy sightseeing. Until you have become acclimatized you should try not to overdo it and if you go out during the hotter parts of the day, cover up and wear a hat (preferably wide-brimmed). Use a sun cream or sun block that is appropriate for your skin type and reapply often. Drink plenty of fluids – far more than you would normally do at home.

Altitude Sickness

Altitude Sickness can affect you at altitudes of 3000 meters and higher. Your additional travel information section contains more information if your trek goes above this altitude. Drugs are accessible to treat the effects of altitude sickness and you should refer to your doctor for more details. You should know that our Tour Leaders do not carry this type of medication.

Personal Medical Kits

You should bring with you a personal supply of basic medical items which can consist of items like plasters, aspirin, insect repellent etc. In areas of inadequate or suspect medical facilities, some travelers also like to take their own emergency medical kit containing needles, syringes and other items which can be used by the local medical staff in case of accident or illness. Our Tour Leaders carry a comprehensive First Aid Kit (including a sterile pack) for emergencies, but do not dispense medicines.

Existing Medical Conditions

All persons joining our tours are assumed to be in good health and to have a sufficient level of fitness to complete their chosen itinerary. If you have an existing medical condition or disability you must make this known at the time of booking. If accepted onto the tour, you must also make your condition known to the Tour Leader. Gateway to Asia reserves the right to deny, without recompense, any person who is found, at any time during their trip, to have concealed an existing medical condition. We also reserve the right to turn away any person who we consider incapable of completing the trip.

If you are taking any form of medication, please make sure that you bring with you an adequate supply to last the duration of your holiday and inform your Tour Leader at the start of the tour. You might not be able to obtain suitable medication in the countries you are visiting.

What to Take

Travel Light

It is important to consider that when you are packing for your trip is that your airline baggage allowance is almost certainly going to be no more than 20 kilos. The next thing to remember is that, apart from a few occasions when hotel porters will take your bags from the hotel to a tour bus – or vice versa – you will have to carry your own luggage.

On some tours there may be specific weight and size restrictions for luggage due to weight limits for porters or the size of storage areas in vehicles / trains. Refer to your Additional travel information section for details. It is almost inevitable that you will want to buy souvenirs of some sort so make sure that you leave space for this in your luggage. We strongly recommend that you carry all souvenirs with you rather than requesting shop keepers to ship them home for you as if you leave your souvenirs behind, they may never arrive, or you could be hit with additional charges such as customs clearance or storage fees. We can accept no responsibility for any lost items or extra charges if you arrange for your purchases to be shipped.

Luggage

For ease of use, the best type of bag to bring is a backpack or a sports bag, preferably with some sort of shoulder strap. This type of bag tends to be less bulky and easier to handle than rigid suitcases. Along with your main bag, we also recommend that you bring:

- **A smaller day pack** for items such as: camera, water, sun cream, hat, etc.
- **A money belt or waist pouch** (bum bag) for your travel documents and money. Your luggage, bags and personal belongings are your own responsibility at all times.

Luggage checklist

As a guideline we have compiled a list of things that you might need on tour. Naturally you will have your own ideas so please remember that (with the exception of 'The Essentials') these lists are only intended as a guide and you should choose which items you wish to bring.

The Essentials

- **Trip dossier(s)**
- **Country dossier(s)**
- **Passport**
- **Cash and/or Travelers**

Cheques

Keep a note of the serial numbers of your cheques and also the emergency contact numbers and keep these details separately from the cheques themselves.

- **Travel insurance**
Carry a photocopy of your policy with you or make sure you leave a photocopy at home.
- **Airline ticket(s)**
- **Vaccination Certificate** – if applicable
- **Tour meeting point address**
- **Travel documents / vouchers**
- **Your travel agent's phone number**

Useful Equipment

- **Inflatable travel pillow**
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- **Money belt or pouch**
- **Water bottle, with strap**
- **Torch and batteries** On camping trips, travel to remote areas and tours with home stays.
- **Plastic bags** These are always helpful for keeping cameras and films dust free and for your dirty laundry.
- **Personal washing/shaving kit***
- **Laundry detergent**
- **Clothesline**
- **Camera and film** Take a good supply of your favorite film & spare camera batteries.
- **Sunglasses**
- **Binoculars**
- **Travel plug / international adapter**
- **Pocket knife***
- **Sewing kit***
- **Travel alarm**
- **Walkman & cassettes / discs**
- **Playing cards / travel games**
- **Moist 'handy / wet wipes'**
- **Anti-bacterial hand cleaner**
- **Writing materials**
- **Universal bath plug**
- **Sun hat**
- **Head scarf / sarong**
- **Lightweight wind/waterproof jacket**

Please make sure that you pack these in your main luggage (not hand baggage) or they may be confiscated before you board your flight.

There are certain items of equipment (e.g. sleeping bags) that you will need on some tours and not on others. Check your Trip Dossier for special luggage requirements.

Medicines, Lotions etc.

- **Insect repellent**
- **Suntan lotion & sunblock**
- **Lip balm**
- **Moisturiser / after sun lotion**
- **Personal medical supplies**
(Aspirin, paracetamol, plasters, bandage, safety pins, antiseptic cream, diarrhoea tablets, Tampons, condoms etc.) Our Tour Leaders carry comprehensive First Aid Kits but these are for emergency use only.
- **Calamine lotion / insect bite cream**
- **Rehydration solution**
- **Ongoing medication**
If you are taking any medication or have a condition that needs specific medicines (e.g. asthma) you **MUST** take all necessary medicines with you. You must also inform your Tour Leader of your condition at the start of your tour.
- **Contact lens solution**
- **Spare pair of glasses & safety cord**

Dust can be a big difficulty if you wear contact lenses. If you are on a long trip you should also take the prescription for your glasses.

Clothing

We recommend that you carry clothing for that is supposed to be lightweight and loose fitting. During the summer season wearing cotton clothes is

recommended because it is comfortable. Please avoid man made fabrics like nylon. During the winters you must carry warm clothing. However you may face situations where the daytime temperature may get hot and the nights could be cold. In these conditions, we recommend that you keep a thick cloth rather than wearing several thin layers of clothing. Some general suggestions and specific dress requirements and can be found in the relevant Country Fact File.

Footwear

Almost all our tours involve some walking or hiking so it is important to bring footwear that is suitable and also comfortable. The question of whether to bring hiking boots is a tricky one to answer. You should consult your Additional travel information for a detailed description of any hiking and trekking on the tour and then decide on what you think you will be most comfortable in. These may be hiking boots, cross terrain style trainers or some other trusty footwear. There really are no hard and fast rules – although it is probably a good idea to take at least two of the following:

- **Lightweight hiking boots**

If you decide to take hiking boots, it is vital that you wear them in before you travel. You should also bring spare laces.

- **Sports / cross terrain shoes**

- **Comfortable shoes**

Deck shoes, desert boots etc. for everyday use (a good idea if you also bring hiking boots).

- **Sandals or thongs**

Laundry

Most of the hotels that we use have a laundry service and, generally speaking, it is not too expensive. Tours often spend two or more days in the same town allowing plenty of time for laundry. You will find it more convenient to travel light and have your clothes laundered (or wash them yourself) than to bring too many. When you are packed and all ready to depart on holiday, you should discard half your luggage.

Photography

Special Permits, Video Cameras & Film

At some historical sites there is a charge for taking your camera 'on site' and others prohibit cameras altogether. Often flash photography is prohibited (even if you have bought a permit) so you may wish to bring a supply of fast film. Rules for video cameras are usually more restrictive than for still cameras. Video cameras must be declared to customs on arrival into many countries and special permits are often necessary for use at historical sites. The availability and quality of camera film will vary considerably in different countries. For more details about permits, traveling with video cameras and the availability of film please see the relevant Country fact file.

Local Sensitivities

Most travelers want to take photographs and most people will love having their picture taken. You should, however, be respectful of people's privacy and cultural differences. If somebody objects to having their picture taken you should always abide by their wishes. If in doubt as to whether you should photograph someone or something consult your Tour Leader.

Forbidden Photos

It may sound obvious, but do not take photographs of (or near) any military

installations, military personnel or airports during your travels as you could get yourself into serious trouble.

Camera Care

It is advisable to keep your camera and lenses in a bag or case that will protect them from dust. Don't forget to take out adequate insurance for your camera equipment – if your camera is a good one, it is unlikely that your standard travel insurance will cover its value. Specific camera insurance is often prohibitively expensive so a more viable option is to make sure that it (and any other valuables) are covered under your home contents insurance policy.

Guidebooks

As most, if not all, of your transport and accommodation arrangements will be taken care of during the course of your tour, we recommend that you choose a guidebook with a good historical content such as a Footprint Guide. This will supplement the information that your Tour Leader provides and can help you gain an even greater understanding of your destination. If you are spending time traveling on your own before or after your tour, you may wish to bring along a guidebook that also has more practical information on accommodation, eating out, transportation etc. For this purpose we recommend a Rough Guide.

Background Reading

As well as guidebooks there are some terrific travelogues, historical accounts and historical fiction. Many of these make excellent reading at any time but are even more fascinating if you happen to be traveling through the country in question. Most good book shops have a section dedicated to travel writing.

Keeping in Touch

Emergency Contact

If someone wants to contact you whilst you are on tour, the best way is for them to contact your booking agent, who can then pass on a message. If your booking agent is closed and someone needs to make contact with you urgently, they should telephone our regional office in the area in which you are traveling. These contact details are shown on each Country fact file. We recommend that you leave a copy of your Trip and Country Dossiers and details of your booking agent with someone at home.

Phoning Tour Hotels

We do not recommend that you ask friends and relatives to contact you by phoning tour hotels. Receptions are often manned by non-English speaking staff and it is highly unlikely that the person answering the phone would be able to locate you. In addition it is also unfortunately not possible to give out details of hotels before the tour starts (except for the meeting point hotel) as these may be subject to change and it is simply not possible to inform all passengers of any changes.

Email

Most of the countries in which we operate now have Internet cafés or other email access facilities. This is developing all the time and you should consult the relevant Country fact file for the availability of email in your destination. Your Tour Leader should also be able to advise you of the local facilities.

Mobile Phones

One of the great magnetism of adventure travel is to take a break away from modern lifestyles. It is therefore a request, as a courtesy to other travelers; you switch off the ring tone on your mobile phones and only use it when absolutely necessary. If you can bear to, it is probably best to leave your phone at home!

Re-confirming Your Tour

If your traveling plans include a little more than just your tour with Discover Asia Tours and you have plans to leave your home some time before the start of your tour, please make sure that you leave a contact number and email address with your travel agent so that you can be contacted in an emergency. Sometimes details of the tour arrangements or the Tour Meeting Point hotel may change at the last minute and it may be essential for us to get in touch with you.

