

# Booking Information

The booking conditions and general information set out below are designed to outline our commitments to you and your commitments to us as clearly as possible. Please read them carefully before booking. We want you to have an enjoyable tour and the avoidance of any misunderstanding is to our mutual advantage

Should you book a tour with us the conditions set out below form the contract between us.

Many of our tours visit developing countries where travel is still an adventure and local conditions are often very different from those we are used to back home. You should be prepared to cope with unusual situations, local inadequacies and unpredictable events as and when they occur.

In particular, you should bear in mind that the standard of hygiene in some places is poor and that 'stomach upsets' of different types are, as a direct result, a hazard of travel in many parts of the world. As we only visit most restaurants etc. on a very infrequent basis we cannot monitor or effectively influence their standards.

## ABOUT OUR TOURS

### Financial Protection

Sovietistan Travel is a tour operator of very long-standing (founded in 2001), with a high level of assets and the financial resources that can provide our clients with peace of mind. Sovietistan Travel is a Kyrgyzstan government licensed tour operator. Despite based outside EU, your payments to us are fully protected against insolvency. We offers you financial security as a serious, reliable and respected tour operator. However, You always has to achieve and purchase a travel insurance – it is the only safety-guarantee that protect your investment in a journey! It is mandatory!

### What a Sovietistan Travel Tour Price Includes

**General Inclusions:** Our tour prices include all mentioned in "Tour Price Includes": e.g. surface transportation (from the notified tour start point to the notified tour endpoint), all accommodations (including taxes and service charges), all meals and all entrance fees.

**Airfares:** As regards airfares, we almost always include all flights that are part of the tour itinerary. There are a very few tours where we exclude one or more integral flights. Such exceptions are always clearly stated and all such instances are because it is cheaper for participants to book these flight sectors as part of their international travel. Why pay more than you need to?

**Bottled Water:** In addition, bottled (or filtered) water will be provided in those countries, regions or specific locations where the local tap water supply is generally considered unsafe to drink (by those with relevant local experience).

Please bear in mind that water supplies are improving in many countries and that an increasing number now have tap water that is perfectly safe to drink, either nationwide or in particular areas. We do appreciate that some clients take a very cautious view about drinking the local water, so you are always welcome to buy bottled water at your own expense anywhere we do not provide it. Our leaders will always be willing to assist in this regard.

Please note that in some situations our leader may decide to provide some bottled water at mealtimes simply because it is impossible to get tap water served at the table and not because there is any health issue locally.

### **What the Tour Price Excludes**

**1. Gratuities.** Our leaders, drivers and local guides work extremely hard to make your tour a success. If you think their service was good or excellent, it is entirely appropriate to give them a gratuity at the end of the tour. It will surely be warmly welcomed.

Gratuities are a matter of personal discretion, but we are often asked for guidelines. We consider that between USD 5-8 per group member per day (or equivalent in any 'hard' currency) would be an appropriate amount. (If there are two leaders, you can divide the gratuity between them.)

**Other Exclusions:** The tour price also excludes drinks (soft drinks, alcoholic drinks and hot beverages), à la carte dishes on those occasions where the included meal is fixed-menu, snacks, laundry, telephone calls, private excursions, excess baggage charges during the tour and anything else of a purely personal nature, including taxes, service charges and tips relating to such items.

The tour price also excludes all expenses incurred before arrival at the starting point of any tour and after arrival at the ending point of any tour, additional accommodation costs, airport transfer costs (unless included), travel insurance, passport charges, vaccination charges, visa charges (including visas obtained on arrival) and excess baggage charges.

In addition, should you decide not to accompany the group for any reason, you are responsible for the extra cost of any accommodation or meals while the rest of the group are elsewhere.

On a very few of our tours, there are additional exclusions and these are clearly specified in the tour description on this website.

## **Accommodation**

As a general rule, we use comfortable hotels, motels, guesthouses and lodges of a medium, good or very good standard, with rooms with en-suite bathrooms, wherever possible. In locations where such accommodations are unavailable, we must use simpler accommodations, although wherever we can we choose those hotels, guesthouses or lodges with great locations, friendly staff, good food or other features that compensate for the simplicity of the establishment! Where any of the accommodation to be used clearly falls below the normal standard of accommodation described above (i.e. medium to very good quality) then such exceptions are specified in the tour description. In a minority of locations overall, usually in developing countries, we have no choice but to use basic or even very basic accommodations.

In the event that the accommodation has to be unexpectedly downgraded for any part of the tour, we shall give you an appropriate refund (equivalent to the difference in price of the accommodation concerned). Please bear in mind that in many developing countries standards of maintenance are poor and this can result in unpredictable hot water supplies and other shortcomings such as faulty showers, toilets or lighting, and missing bath plugs or toilet paper.

## **Sharing Rooms**

If you are a couple travelling together then please indicate on your booking form whether you prefer a double-bedded room (i.e. one large bed) or a twin-bedded room (i.e. two smaller beds), by indicating 'Double' or 'Twin' as appropriate. There is not always a choice but we will try to match preferences where we can.

Over half of those travelling with us are alone and some people in this situation prefer to share a room with another party member of the same sex for the sake of company or economy. If you are travelling alone and would prefer to share a twin-bedded room then please indicate this on the booking form by indicating 'Twin' in the question about accommodation.

**Important:** Bookings from those electing to share are only accepted on the condition that, should no roommate be available, you will accept single accommodation and pay the appropriate single accommodation supplement.

Priority in allocation of room-mates is strictly based on the order in which bookings are received (except, of course, where friends who book separately but simultaneously both indicate on their booking forms that they wish to share with each other). Naturally, the earlier you book the higher the chance of being able to share, although there are occasions when even those who book far ahead fail to find a roommate. In particular, few women opt to share. (Smokers should kindly note that smoking is not allowed in the room if you are sharing with a non-smoker, which is much the most likely scenario as less than 5% of our group members smoke.)

## **Single Rooms**

Many hotels and lodges now charge a flat room rate for their twin-bedded or double-bedded rooms, regardless of whether one person or two people occupy them. The inevitable consequence is costly supplements for single occupancy. Where rooms intended for single-occupancy exist, the standard and location of such rooms may not be as good as that of twin or double rooms.

Please note that we cannot give an absolute guarantee that single accommodation will always be provided for those requesting it, but we can say that it is a rare event that people have to share unexpectedly. When unexpected sharing has to occur, the lack of availability at a particular hotel or lodge is usually not notified to us in advance and is only discovered on arrival. At some locations, usually remote lodges, single rooms are not available at any time, or only provided in return for a huge supplement: any such instances are mentioned in the tour description. If a single room is not available for you at any location where it was expected and paid for we will make an appropriate refund after the end of the tour. Please note that the extra cost per night of single accommodation often varies widely over the course of a tour (remote lodges can sometimes be more expensive than first-class city hotels, while small, basic hotels cost far less), so any refund will reflect these variations in costs.

While we will do our utmost to secure single accommodation for those requesting it, bookings are only accepted on the understanding that you will consent to share in the event of an unexpected lack of single accommodation at any location (we want to stress that this is generally a rare event, but as it can happen you must be prepared for the possibility, however remote).

## **Surface Transport**

We use small coaches or minibuses/passenger vans during most of our tours. Where necessary we use cars or 4-wheel-drive vehicles. Please bear in mind that in many developing countries vehicles are frequently not maintained to a high standard and the level of comfort is often well below what we are used to back home.

## **Joining/Leaving Tours**

All participants need to ensure that they reach the starting point for the tour in good time. We will notify you in good time where the joining point will be, and at what time of day.

Kindly note that in the event your own arrival flight is rescheduled or delayed so that you are unable to arrive by the scheduled tour joining time, it is not possible for us to delay the rest of the group for long, and any costs incurred in catching up with the group would be your own responsibility. Consequently, we would advise you to arrange a flight that will allow you a generous safety margin.

Kindly note that we cannot accept any responsibility in the event you are somehow prevented from reaching the departure airport in time as a result of a badly delayed internal flight, a traffic jam caused by an accident or some other unanticipated event.

Important: If you are not making your air travel arrangements through us, please be sure to send us your full flight itinerary at least three months before the tour starts.

### **Hotel & Airport Transfer Bookings**

Prior/after departure: We will be pleased to arrange hotel accommodation at airports or elsewhere in connection with our tours for anyone needing this. Private transfers can also be arranged, where needed. Please contact us.

### **International Flight Arrangements**

International flights are generally included as part of our tours, except from countries outside Europe, but we have a separate IATA airline ticket booking agency that can make efficient flight arrangements for you anywhere in the world. The difference in price will be noticed prior your booking, so You can decide, i.e. If You live in USA and wish to join, the tour price stated include flight from an European destination, and there might be difference: e.g. Your flight from USA costs 1.400 USD and our flight-included cost e.g. 900 USD – then You pay only the difference (1.400 – 900) USD = 500 USD!

Acting as a booking agent, we will be pleased to arrange flights for you to and from the tour starting and ending points. If you ask us to book flights you acknowledge that this is a separate travel arrangement from the tour as such and does not form part of a package. Flight cancellation and amendment regulations are set by each individual airline.

If you are willing to pay a considerable premium, business class flights can be arranged.

Should you wish to extend your tour in the country concerned (by flying out early, deferring your return, or both), we can arrange this for you.

We strongly recommend flying out in advance of any tour that involves a long-haul flight and taking a day to recover from the effects of a long flight and 'jet-lag'. We feel confident you will be fresher and enjoy the tour more.

Wherever possible we use quality airlines with excellent safety records for international flights. There is little or no choice as regards carriers on most domestic flights.

**Important:** Lower fare category tickets typically have refund and rebooking restrictions in the event of cancellation, non-use, no-show or redating. Fully changeable and refundable air tickets are available, but these are typically much more expensive. Many people opt for tickets that can be redated or cancelled in return for a charge. We do not recommend the purchase of non-refundable and non-changeable air tickets.

**Important:** Revising flight arrangements at a later date, after you have made an original request for air travel arrangements to us, can result in you suffering costly airline cancellation or rebooking charges, so please bear this in mind.

## **BOOKING & PAYING FOR A TOUR**

### **Bookings**

To make a definite booking you first need to complete the online booking form on our website and submit it to us electronically.

Once we have received the booking form, you need to pay us the required deposit per person, as specified in the tour description. Our office will let you know the amount of deposit required. (Some tours have both initial deposit and interim payment requirements: such cases are clearly specified in the tour description.)

If you are booking less than 60 days before the date of departure of the tour you will need to send full payment immediately.

Please see the Payments section below for payment methods.

On receipt of your booking form and deposit, our official confirmation will be sent to you.

The person signing the booking form warrants that he/she has the authority to make the booking on behalf of all other persons included on the booking form.

For your own protection, we strongly recommend that when you make a booking you hold travel insurance that will cover you for medical/repatriation expenses and for cancellation/curtailment charges in the event you have to cancel due to the illness of yourself, a travelling companion or a close relative. If you do not already have travel insurance you should take this out as soon as possible.

### **Airfare Payment**

If you are arranging your air travel in connection with the tour through us, we will need full payment at the time we book your flights.

### **Tour Invoice**

Unless specified otherwise in the individual tour description, the invoice for the remaining balance of the tour cost will be sent by email approximately 90 days before the tour start date and the full payment due needs to be received by us no later than 7 days from the date of invoicing. We will acknowledge your payment promptly.

Please note that we will treat your booking as cancelled by you if your payment due has not been received by us 14 days after the date of tour invoicing. Cancellation charges (30 USD) will apply.

If you are going to be away from home when the tour payment is due, please make arrangements with our office for early payment.

## **PAYMENTS FOR SOVIETISTAN TRAVEL TOURS**

Sovietistan Travel clients may opt to pay for a tour in the tour pricing currency or by paying the equivalent at the time in any other currency listed below:

### **Payments**

You may pay by one of the following methods:

Make a bank transfer of the required amount in agreed currency (stated on the website and tour program. Our staff will inform You about the bank details when we have received your booking form!

### **Our Exchange-Rate Policy**

If you elect to pay for the tour in a currency other than the tour pricing currency, we will convert the amount due on your tour invoice to the equivalent amount in your elected currency. We undertake to use the international 'spot rate' prevailing at the time your tour invoice is prepared. This is a very advantageous exchange rate for you, being the mid-point between the bank buying and selling rates for the currency in question. However, when we purchase the tour pricing currency ourselves, we can only obtain the inferior bank exchange rate. This means that, by giving you such a favourable exchange rate, we voluntarily absorb increased costs that amount to 2-4% of the tour cost.

## **CANCELLING OR TRANSFERRING A BOOKING**

### **Pls read "TERMS & CONDITIONS"**

voicing. Standard cancellation charges will apply.

### **Air Ticket Cancellation**

If you have had us arrange air tickets for you, to/from the joining/ending points of a tour, and you subsequently have to cancel your booking, you will be charged the cancellation fee(s) applied by the airline(s) concerned. Most air tickets we supply are completely non-refundable. If there is any refund available, kindly note that it can take up to six months or more to obtain refunds from some airlines.

## **Transfers to other tours**

If you wish to transfer your booking to another tour, this will normally be treated as a cancellation and rebooking, and the relevant cancellation charges will apply.

## **Substitution**

Should you be prevented by reasonable cause (such as illness) from proceeding with your tour you are free to find a substitute, provided we receive written notification. Within two months of the tour departure date, we may not be able to accept a substitution as within this period there may not be sufficient time for the substitute to complete visa, health or other travel requirements. Any additional costs incurred as a result of a substitution (such as airline cancellation and reticketing charges) are your responsibility. We reserve the right to reject any substitute should we have reasonable grounds for doing so.

## **Unused Services**

No refund can be given for any unused accommodation, meal, flight or other service provided as part of the tour

## **Why are Cancellation Charges necessary?**

There are a number of reasons why cancellation charges are a standard feature in the travel industry. The most common reasons for group tour operators like ourselves are as follows:

1. We typically have to make payments to local agents or other suppliers far in advance of any tour (often a year or more ahead), otherwise we cannot hold the arrangements for an entire group. As a tour gets closer, we have to pay out more and more. In many instances, we are not able to recover these payments, or only part of them, in the event someone cancels.
2. Cancellations also have additional consequences. Replacement bookings are very unpredictable and we cannot count on receiving them even if cancellations occur far ahead of a tour. In a small group context, and if there were no cancellation charges, even one or two cancellations could cause a tour to become economically unviable and have to be cancelled, upsetting participants, or cause remaining group members to have to pay a small party supplement when otherwise it would not have been necessary.

If the reason for your cancellation falls within the terms of your travel insurance the cancellation charges will normally be refunded by your insurance company (less any excess applicable). For this reason, we strongly recommend taking out comprehensive travel insurance that will cover you adequately for an unexpected cancellation.

## **PRICE ALTERATIONS**

### **Price Reductions**

We reserve the right to reduce the price of any tour, at our discretion.

### **Price Increases**

For each tour on our website, we state the currency in which the tour is priced. Most of our tours are priced in US Dollars, with a minority in other currencies. Amounts shown in currencies other than the tour pricing currency are only indicative, as exchange rates vary over time.

We undertake not to increase the price of any of our tours, in the currency in which the tour is priced, owing to changes in exchange rates.

We reserve the right to increase the price of a tour, in the currency in which the tour is priced, in the event of cost increases incurred by us that stem directly or indirectly from increases in fuel costs or increases in government taxes, fees, dues or levies. Such reasons for price increases are uncommon, but they do occur from time to time.

In order to maintain the prices advertised in our tour descriptions, we are dependent on reaching a certain level of support for each tour or extension. Most tours and extensions are based on a minimum of 5 participants, although some tours, including those involving boat charters, have higher minimum levels.

The great majority of our tours and extensions achieve the required minimum level, but some do not. We appreciate that it is very frustrating to have a long-anticipated tour or extension cancelled, so it has long been our policy to do everything possible to ensure that our tours (including any extensions) operate and that our clients and friends are not disappointed. We regularly operate tours and extensions with just a few participants.

In the event that the required level of bookings for standard operation is not reached, we will still go ahead and operate the tour or extension if we possibly can. We face considerably increased costs per head in such situations (including an increase in leader costs per head) and so we may have to charge a small party supplement in order to cover the increased costs per head.

We will absorb cost increases stemming from a) fuel cost increases, b) increases in government taxes, fees, dues or levies and c) the impact of small party size up to a total amount equivalent to 2% of the total tour price, in the indicated pricing currency, as shown in the tour description on our website.

No price increase for the above reasons will be made less than 20 days before departure. If any price increase to you for the above reasons, after a 2% absorption by us, exceeds 10% of the total price of the tour in the indicated pricing currency (i.e. the total tour price, including any extensions and/or single supplements) as shown in

the tour description on our website, you may either opt to pay the increase or you may opt to cancel your booking and receive a full refund or transfer your booking to another of our tours, provided we receive written notification (email is acceptable) within 14 days of the date of despatch of the price increase notification.

Kindly note that normal cancellation charges will apply if you decide to cancel your booking following notification of a price increase to you, for the above reasons, that is 8% or less of the total tour price in the currency in which the tour has been priced.

## **TOUR ALTERATIONS & CANCELLATIONS**

### **Tour Alteration**

The tour descriptions are prepared up to three years before the date of operation of the tours they feature and subsequent variations may sometimes be made to published details, either voluntarily by us or involuntarily. All tour details are provisional until the confirmed tour description, with confirmed rather than provisional prices, is published on our website.

We frequently make changes to our tour itineraries to keep up to date with ever-changing birding knowledge and developments, with the aim of improving your tour. Occasionally we may have to make involuntary changes when access situations at particular venues deteriorate, or where they become closed or otherwise inaccessible for some reason. We reserve the right to modify our itineraries where we deem it desirable or necessary. We also reserve the right to substitute a competent alternative leader for a published leader where we deem it desirable or necessary, although we will always do our best to minimize leader changes.

Other examples of changes that can be expected from time to time include changes to the tour dates (by up to 7 days in either direction announced more than 9 months before the original tour start date, or up to three days in either direction announced between 4-9 months before the original tour start date), minor changes to the tour duration (lengthening by up to 24 hours, or shortening by up to 12 hours), re-ordering of the itinerary, changes to the amount of time spent at each venue and changes to accommodation.

Naturally, we will notify you as soon as possible in the event of changes to the tour dates. Such changes as specified above, and other such changes, will not have a significant impact on the performance of the tour or your ability to travel and are not grounds for cancellation without charges.

Very occasionally major alterations to tour dates are necessary which might materially affect your ability to travel. We define such major alteration as a change to the tour dates by more than 7 days in either direction made more than 9 months before the original tour start date, a change to the tour dates by more than 3 days in either direction made between 4-9 months before the original tour start date, or any change to the tour dates made within 4 months of the original tour start date.

Naturally, we will notify you as soon as possible in the event of any alteration of the tour dates that have to be made.

If a major date alteration, as defined above, is made by us, you may either agree to proceed with the tour over the revised dates or, if you prefer, you may cancel your booking and receive a full refund or transfer your booking to another of our tours, provided we receive written notification (email is acceptable) within 14 days of the date of despatch of our notification.

If an alteration is made to a tour where the price has been confirmed and which results in a substantial increase in costs (i.e. over 8%), we will absorb whatever we can of the cost increases and only pass any remaining balance to you. In the event of such an alteration, you will have the option to either agree to proceed with the tour as modified and accept the price increase we specify or, if you prefer, you may cancel your booking and receive a full refund or transfer your booking to another of our tours, provided we receive written notification (email is acceptable) within 14 days of the date of despatch of our notification.

Very rarely major alterations to the tour itinerary become necessary, through circumstances amounting to force majeure (see Tour Cancellation), either before or after departure. In such rare situations, we will do our very best to modify your tour in a manner that minimizes necessary disruption. We will make a partial refund to you if the modified itinerary results in a cost-saving.

Please note that we cannot take responsibility for any additional costs or losses that you may face, including any airline amendment charges you may suffer, as a result of either minor or major itinerary alterations that are caused by circumstances outside our control.

## **OTHER INFORMATION**

### **Group Size Limits and Number of Leaders**

We reserve the right to increase the group size limit by one in certain circumstances. Examples include tours where we have one place left on a tour and we receive a booking from a couple or two friends, and tours where an extension is otherwise full, but not the main tour. We also reserve the right to alter the group size limit in unusual and exceptional circumstances.

Where two leaders are listed, we may only send both leaders if the tour is sufficiently well supported; alternatively, we may elect to send both regardless of group size. Where only one leader is listed, we may elect to send an additional leader with the group.

## **Airlines, Airports and Aircraft Types**

As all flights in connection with our tours are arranged on an individual basis, we are not in a position to state in the tour descriptions the airlines or airports to be used by our clients. If you book air travel with us, details will be provided in your flight schedule, which will be sent out well in advance of your travel. We are not in a position to state the aircraft types which will be used.

## **Passports, Visas and Vaccinations**

You are responsible for ensuring that you bring with you a valid passport (which should have at least 6 months left to run at the commencement of the tour) plus, where necessary, a valid visa and/or a valid Yellow Fever vaccination certificate. Remember, if your passport is getting full, that any visa will require a full blank page plus space on the opposite page for entry and exit stamps. The tour information we will send you will provide information about any visa or vaccination certificate requirements known to us at the time the information is issued, but, as regulations can change, you are normally responsible for checking visa requirements yourself and, if a visa is necessary, obtaining your visa direct from the appropriate embassy or consulate.

## **Privacy Policy**

All names and addresses on our mailing list are stored on computer files. These files will most definitely not be passed to any other party, for advertising purposes or for any other reason, but should you object to having your name and address stored in this way please inform our office and we will remove your entry. We do not store credit card details, nor do we share customer details with any third parties.

## **Complaints**

In the unlikely event that you have cause for complaint, you should notify one of the leaders (or our office where appropriate) as soon as possible so that we may do our best to assist you. If a problem remains unresolved in spite of prompt notification then you should make a complaint in writing to our office within 28 days of the completion of the tour.

## **Restrictions on Participation**

We reserve the right to remove from any tour any person unable or unwilling to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with the satisfactory operation of the tour and/or the good reputation of the company. In this event, we will make no refund, nor be liable to pay any compensation, and any additional travel costs involved in returning home are your own responsibility. Prior to departure, we reserve the right to remove from any tour any person who we deem, owing to their conduct, to be incompatible with the good operation or reputation of our company, its employees and its tours. In this event, we will make a full refund of the payment received to date only when removing someone prior to final invoicing. After that date there will be no refund.

## **TRAVEL INSURANCE**

It is very important that you obtain insurance cover against the usual risks associated with travel, from the time of booking your tour until the time you return home. If you are in a position to take out travel insurance you would be very ill-advised to travel without it. Please ensure that your insurance provides adequate protection against the two major concerns: medical/repatriation expenses while abroad and cancellation/curtailment charges in the event that you, or a travelling companion or close relative, fall ill either before or during the tour. Most of those travelling abroad more than once a year will find that taking out an annual travel insurance policy is the simplest and most cost-effective option.

If You carry a lot of expensive optical and photographic equipment. Regular travel insurance does not provide sufficient cover and so, if you are not already covered under your household contents policy, we recommend you take out specialist insurance cover for your equipment.

