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Trip Notes

ADVENTURE PIONEERS - ISTANBUL TO TEHRAN

Trip code: ATP
Country: Turkey/Iran
Amended: February 2009
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HIGHLIGHTS

- Ancient history and monuments of the Ottoman Empire
- Travel across the continental divide on the Trans-Asia Express from Istanbul to Tehran
- Shiraz - the city of poets, roses and nightingales and ancient Persian centre. Mausoleums, bazaars, mosques and formal gardens
- Persepolis - the heart of the Achaemenian Empire
- Isfahan (also spelt Esfahan) - the old capital and the 'jewel of Islamic Iran'
- Yazd - home to the Zoroastrian Towers of Silence

SUMMARY



A trip for the traveller interested in seeing beneath the surface of Turkey's and Iran's incredibly varied past. We travel from Istanbul to Tehran on the world famous Trans Asia Express train. Iran is a country of dramatic contrasts. Its scenery ranges from snow-clad mountains to vast, inhospitable deserts punctuated by attractive oasis towns, and its cities and ancient sites reveal a deep and rich history. Some of the most exquisite examples of Middle Eastern design and architecture are to be found in Iran, including the magnificent ruins of Persepolis, the dazzling Islamic centres at Isfahan and Shiraz, and beautifully-crafted gardens set in desert wastes. The rich bazaars and the ancient tradition of hospitality never fail to impress in a country which sees few tourists. This is a very rewarding trip for anyone wishing to gain insight into the Persian culture and peoples.

NB: In these trip notes we talk about Persia and Iran. In 1934 Persia was renamed Iran, the name Iran comes from the Aryan tribe meaning 'of noble origin'.

To view pictures of this trip, please visit:

www.exodus.co.uk/picpages/atp.html

JOINING THE TRIP IN LONDON

Itinerary start

Please note the group flight from London is a daytime flight departing on Day 1 of the itinerary.

Flights from London

We normally use the scheduled services of two airlines Turkish Airlines and British Midland (depending on availability). Current flight timings are given below; these were correct at the time of publication but they cannot be confirmed until approximately two weeks before departure.

11 days, depart London, return London

Depart	Time	Arrive	Time
London Heathrow T3	16:30	Istanbul	22:25
Tehran	08:00	London Heathrow T3	08:55

All flight times are local and + Indicates a next day arrival

UK Regional Flights

Exodus can arrange flights from the majority of the UK's regional airports that are more flexible and convenient than if booked separately. Please contact our sales team for details.

Please note that if booking your regional flights other than with Exodus, you must allow a minimum connecting time (in addition to the international check in time) of 1 hour at Gatwick, and 1.5 hours at Heathrow; this is longer than the official minimum connecting time, but baggage handling at Heathrow is known to be subject to delays.

JOINING THE TRIP IN ISTANBUL

11 days start Istanbul end Tehran.

Itinerary start

Your trip normally starts at our hotel in Istanbul on the evening of Day 1 of the itinerary listed below. Details of how to reach the start point are given in the Final Joining Instructions.

Airport Transfers

If you require airport transfers, you may (by prior arrangement only) be able to join the group transfer. Transfers are arranged to coincide with the arrival time of the group flight.



Exodus Travels Ltd

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Group flights can be rescheduled, so you must check the group flight details 2 weeks before departure. If you do not take this transfer, or miss it, you must make your own way to the joining point at your own expense. Joining the group transfer is free of charge.

Full joining instructions including local emergency numbers will be sent to you as part of our Final Joining Instructions. If you do not receive these at least a week before departure, or require them earlier please contact our office or your travel agent.

LAND ONLY ITINERARY



The entries in bold at the end of each day indicate the type of accommodation normally used (see accommodation section overleaf for key to codes) and meals included (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)

Day 1 Start Istanbul. CH (/)

Day 2 Istanbul We start off our trip through Turkey with a full day highlights tour of Istanbul. Includes a visit to Hagia Sofia, built in the 6th century by Justinian, it remained the largest church in Christendom for centuries, converted to a Mosque by the Ottomans, and then to a museum by the secular Republic. Other places to visit are the famous Blue Mosque, the Hippodrome square at the heart of old Stamboul, and the Topkapi Palace which was the residence of the Ottoman sultans for 400 years. We board the Trans-Asia Express in the evening and depart. First Class air-conditioned compartments comprise 4 berths and are of a reasonable standard. Bed linen is provided. **Overnight Train (B,D)**

Day 3-5 Train to Tehran We have three days aboard the train, which is actually two connecting trains, a Turkish one from Istanbul to Tatvan pier, then a ferry across Lake Van (90km), then an Iranian train from Van pier to Tehran.

On leaving Istanbul's Haydarpasha Station we roll through industrial areas and busy suburbs as the line follows the coast of the Sea of Marmara. Leaving the sea, we climb onto the Anatolian plateau as we continue through the night, reaching Ankara early in the morning. The country becomes bleaker and the mountains higher as we approach Kayseri, dominated by the great bulk of an extinct volcano, Erciyes Dag. The line curves back north again to Sivas and passes through some dramatic landscapes as we approach Malatya and Elazig, crossing the Euphrates and the lakes behind the huge Ataturk Dam. Further east is some of the poorest country on the trip before we reach the beautiful shores of Lake Van at Tatvan. If it is light we can see the huge mass of Suphan Dag to the north, and maybe catch a glimpse of the delightful Akhdamar Island with its beautiful Armenian church. On arrival in Van city we board the Iranian train and continue a few miles to the border at Kapirkoy. The crossing takes place in the dark. Once over the border the line drops a little to the shore of the startlingly blue Lake Urumia (unfortunately this section is usually in the dark) and reaches Tabriz in the early morning, where there is a break for Iranian customs to inspect the train. The line then curves south through a typically Iranian landscape of broad valleys and yellow hills to Zanjan and Qazvin. The last leg is along the foothills of the bare Elbruz mountains before we finally roll into the huge urban sprawl of Tehran in the early evening. On arrival in Tehran on the evening of day 5 we will be transferred to our hotel

If you bring playing cards, dominoes or backgammon, you'll be eagerly joined by Turks and Iranians in the communal areas, which is a great way of finding out about the countries as well as passing the time. **Overnight Train days 3/4 (/) CH day 5 (/)**

Day 6 Tehran to Shiraz In the morning we fly to the city of Shiraz, the capital of the province of Fars. It was from here that the great Achaemenids, Cyrus and Darius, ruled from the 6th century BC, and later the Sassanians until the Arab invasion in the 7th century, and it is here that we find the remains of their cities. Shiraz is an atmospheric city and holds a very romantic place in the heart of Iranians. It may lack the magnificence of Isfahan but as a city famous for its roses, nightingales and poetry, its beauty is both subtle and evocative. The mausoleums of

Persia's two most famous poets, Hafez and Sa'di are to be found here in very peaceful gardens. Present day Shiraz is a mixture of the hustle and bustle of modern life, covered bazaars with wonderful crafts and brightly coloured nomads' textiles. The serene havens of tiled madrassahs, glorious gardens, such as the Bagh-e Eram, and many mosques tiled with the rose motif, including the exquisite Nasir al-Mulk of the Qajar era, are testimony to why this is the Iranian people's favourite city. **CH (B,L,D)**

Day 7 Shiraz to Yazd We have a long drive of 450km from Shiraz to Yazd and en route we visit Persepolis and Pasargadae. Persepolis was the ceremonial capital of Darius I. This is a magnificent complex of ancient ruins: columns, carved gateways, forty foot tall sculptured horses and bulls, reception hall, Winter Palace and the famous carved Apadana Staircase. It is the best-preserved monument of the Old Persian Empire and has attracted archaeologists from all over the world. We shall also visit the tombs of Darius I and II, Xerxes and Artaxerxes at Naqsh-e Rostam. At Pasargadae, which pre-dates Persepolis we have the opportunity to see the simple but imposing tomb of Cyrus the Great, the Founder of the Persian Empire, and remains of his several palaces, all located in the beautiful plain of Dasht-e-Morghab. **CH (B,L,D)**

Day 8 Yazd to Isfahan Yazd is a true desert city and the centre of Zoroastrianism, Persia's ancient religion of fire worshippers. It was an important trading centre on the Silk Road and renowned for its silk and carpet weaving. We spend this morning looking around Yazd: we will see the wind towers designed to catch even the smallest movement of air and direct it downwards to cool the living quarters below and visit the beautiful Dowlat Abad Garden and Pavilion. Also the Towers of Silence, where the Zoroastrians laid out their dead to be eaten by the vultures. The old town of Yazd is a maze of narrow lanes and old mud structures.

In the afternoon we drive to the architectural centre of Iran, Isfahan, 300kms away via Na'in, a charming desert town, half way between Yazd and Isfahan. Time permitting we will visit its famous 10th century Friday Mosque and the 17th century Pirnia House/Ethnographic Museum. **CH (B,L,D)**

Day 9 Isfahan to Tehran 'Isfahan nesf-e jahan', Isfahan is half the world, the magnificent capital of Shah Abbas I. Architecturally, Isfahan is one of the most important cities of the world. At its centre is the Maidan-e Imam (Imam Square), one of the finest city squares in the world, with the immense tiled Imam Mosque, Ali Ghapu's Palace and the mosque of Sheikh Lotfollah along the sides. The Bazaar Qaisarieh, or Imperial Bazaar, is a labyrinth of domed alleyways, filled with carpets, textiles, sweets and spices, metal work, tile-makers, jewellers and bright clothes which stretches from the Imam Square all the way to the 10th century Friday Mosque in the north. It was among the bazaaris such as these that the revolution of 1978 took root. We will visit the Vank Cathedral within the Armenian sector, Jolfa, and may possibly have time to experience the phenomenon of the 'shaking minarets' of the Minar-e Jonban in the west. Isfahan is a rarity among Iranian cities in that a river, the Zayandeh, passes through it. This contributes to the pleasant climate of the city whilst its bridges, particularly the Si o Se Pol (the Bridge of Thirty-three Arches), and the Khaju Bridge, provide the perfect setting to spend the evening drinking tea and smoking a 'hubble-bubble'. We finish with a visit to the Qeisarieh Bazaar with hundreds of shops displaying the arts and handicrafts for which Isfahan is world-famous. In the evening we fly back to Tehran. **CH (B,L,D)**

Day 10 Today we have a guided tour exploring the National Museum which contains a fantastic collection of prehistoric, ancient and Islamic artefacts. We also visit the Glass & Ceramics Museum with its beautiful collection of glass and pottery. **CH (B,L,D)**

Day 11 End Tehran. (B)

The group return flight to London is a daytime flight arriving home on day 11.

We are delighted to announce this holiday features the winning itinerary of our [Adventure Pioneers competition](#)

KEY TO ACCOMMODATION

CH Comfortable Hotel, Lodge or Gite - twin rooms with en suite facilities, reliable electricity and water supply, good service and some added amenities.

ACCOMMODATION, FOOD & TRANSPORT

Accommodation

We indicate in the itinerary what type of accommodation is provided on each day. The descriptions below are guidelines only and are used to give an idea of the accommodation offered, rather than an exact description.

Single Accommodation

If you would like a single room on this trip you should book this at the time of booking. This must be done before departure. The cost is from £200, and does not include nights on the train.

Food

In the itinerary we state which meals are included on which day.

Persian cuisine has always been highly rated, but standards in restaurants have dropped since the revolution in Iran, the reason being the lack of choice and good ingredients. However, the restaurants we use are mostly quite good. Breakfast usually consists of Iranian flat bread (nan) with jam, yoghurt, goat's cheese, eggs and lots of tea or coffee. The usual main meal is rice (excellent quality), served with kebabs, mild curries, fish (particularly Shiraz and in the North), salads and yoghurt. Dessert usually consists of fresh fruit, particularly melon, or ice-cream.

Iranian cuisine does not cater for vegetarians particularly well. Most restaurants will do their best to oblige but it will sometimes mean simply having the prepared meal but without the meat.

The restaurant car on the train serves cheap meals, with basic vegetarian options. Most train passengers alternate eating in the restaurant car with buying snacks and fruit from local vendors at stations along the way.

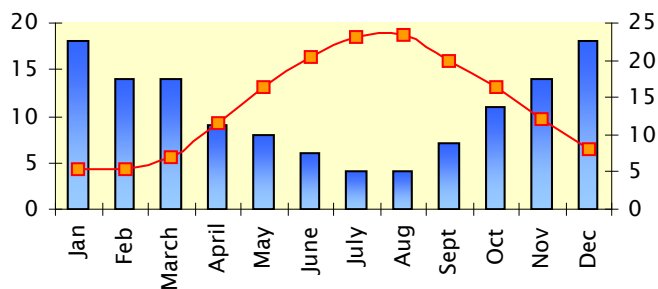
NB Possession and consumption of alcohol is strictly prohibited in Iran.

Transport

A comfortable air-conditioned bus is used in Iran.

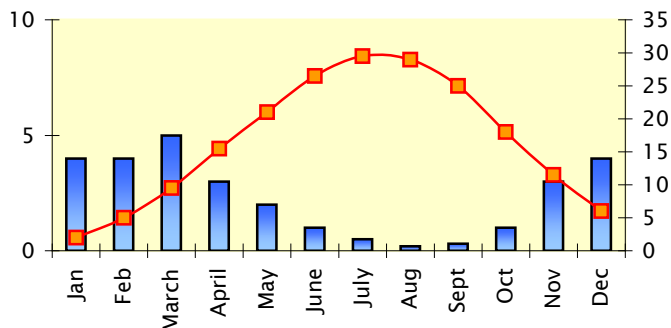
WEATHER

Weather chart for Istanbul



Wet Days / month Av Temp deg C

Weather chart for Tehran



Wet Days / month Av Temp deg C

Night-time temperatures in Istanbul are some degrees cooler, and in April and October it may get a little chilly at night. Rain is rare although the occasional storm can be experienced. There is the occasional cloudy day, but protracted spells of bad weather are unlikely at this time of year.

Iran has long, extremely hot summers, but the winters are cold. We normally travel in spring and early autumn when the temperature should not be below 5°C at night and will be between 20 and 30°C during the day; in June and September these may go up to 35°C, particularly in the desert. We should have sunny weather most of the time, but there can be some rain at these times of year.

IS THIS TRIP FOR YOU?

Iran's weather should be taken into consideration. The trip runs during autumn, therefore trying to avoid the extreme heat of the summer, but it can still get hot during these periods, especially in the desert. Iran also has a strict moral and dress codes for men and women, which must be adhered to through out the trip. Alcohol is prohibited. This must be considered when thinking about doing the trip.

A fair amount of travelling is involved and there are some long days, Shiraz to Yadz and Yadz to Isfahan, but these are generally broken up with sightseeing en route or on arrival.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Tourism can be a real help to local communities, providing income, positive cultural exchanges and a financial incentive to protect their natural environment.

Ours is a 'total approach' to responsible tourism, covering everything from the way we plan and operate our trips to the practices of Exodus as a company. Exodus trips are designed to allow a high degree of economic benefit to the local communities; we buy local produce, eat local food and use local services, thus ensuring that as much money as possible is retained within the local economies and the host communities. With our responsible tourism policy we are continually reassessing our holidays, trying at all times to ensure that they are socially, economically and environmentally sound.



Awards for our work on Responsible Tourism

2006. British Travel Awards: Environmentally Responsible Tourism Company.

2004. Responsible Travel Awards: Best Tour Operator.

2002. BA Tourism for Tomorrow Awards: Highly Commended.

For full details of our Responsible Tourism Policy please visit:

www.exodus.co.uk/responsible-travel

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Passports and Visas

All nationalities require a full passport that must be valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information offered below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

Holders of UK, Austrian, Irish, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and USA passport holders require visas. The visa can only be obtained on arrival; British pay £10 in cash, Irish €15 in cash, US citizens pay US\$20 in cash and all others pay the equivalent of £10 in US\$ cash or other hard currency. The visa is valid for a stay of up to three months. South African passport holders may also buy a visa on entry for a stay of up to 30 days - for a longer stay a visa from a Turkish Embassy is required.

Nearly all nationalities need a visa for Iran; this is arranged through an invitation from our Iranian partners. The cost depends on nationality: for British passport holders applying in the UK it is currently £68 plus a service fee of £30.00 including VAT and £5 for post & packaging (if using Travcours). Authorisation for your visa has to be applied for 6 weeks before departure and details of the procedure are sent on booking (please see the Iranian visa sheet). Please note that visa regulations can change at short notice and without warning and are outside our control.

Visa regulations can and do change without notice and if you are not a British passport holder please check the current regulations in good time to obtain a visa if one is required.

For information on how to obtain visas please call Travcours on 020 7223 5295 or visit their website: www.travcours.com. We strongly recommend using Travcours for your visa.

An additional help sheet will be sent to you on booking to provide further information on obtaining your visa.

Vaccinations and Health

There are no mandatory vaccination requirements for this trip, however it is advised that you are vaccinated against Polio, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Typhoid and Hepatitis A.

Taking malaria tablets in some areas of Iran is advised; we therefore suggest that you seek further advice from your GP or travel health clinic.

The above information can change at short notice, and as we are not qualified to answer all your questions in regards to travel health we strongly recommend you contact your GP or a Travel Health Clinic at least 8 weeks prior to departure for up-to-date information.

Nomad Travel Clinics are experts in preparing people for travel, providing expert advice on vaccinations, anti-malarial and staying healthy whilst overseas. We have arranged a special 10% discount for Exodus passengers on any vaccinations that you may require! Take along your Nomad discount card, sent with your confirmation pack, or call Exodus for your special discount code.

Visit www.nomadtravel.co.uk/exodus for further information.

For additional information please visit: www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk

Insurance

It is a condition of joining this trip that you must be insured against medical and personal accident risks.

Please see www.exodus.co.uk/about-exodus/travel-insurance for more details.

Local Time is GMT +2 -3.5 hrs

Group, Staff and Support

The group will generally be between 6 and 18 people. There will be a local leader and a driver and local guides where needed.

The minimum age of clients on this trip is 16 years. Please note that children aged 16 or 17 years of age must be accompanied by (and share accommodation with) a parent or legal guardian.



MONEY MATTERS

Exodus and Local Payments

There is no local payment on this holiday. As of 1st January 2008, Exodus no longer use 'local payments' to cover part of the cost of the holiday. While some of the headline prices seem higher, we have not added any extra costs into the total price, apart from the local payment and any standard annual fluctuation in price.

If you are comparing prices with other operators, please check the total price paid, as we believe that Exodus offers the best balance between value for money and operational quality.

Currency Information

Turkey:

The national currency of Turkey is the Turkish New Lira (TRY), with an exchange rate of approximately 1.22 to the US\$ and 2.38 to the UK£. Exchange rates are correct at the time of publication.

Money is easily exchanged on arrival in Turkey and we therefore recommend that you do not bring any with you from home. Unlimited foreign currency may be imported and exported though you may (exceptionally) be requested to declare it on arrival.

We recommend that you do not bring Travellers cheques. It is best to use a mixture of Sterling cash and ATM machines.

Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted in shops for larger purchases. Turkey has a good network of cash machines (don't forget your pin number!), which can be used to get advances in Lira. It should be noted that Scottish pound notes are not accepted in Turkey.

Iran:

In Iran the currency is the Rial, but quite often prices are quoted in Toman, which is 10 Rials, so always be sure to check whether a price quoted is in Rials or Toman. At the time of writing £1 = 14, 950 Rials. Iran can suffer from high inflation, but rates of exchange more or less rise in line with prices. You are advised to take ALL your personal spending money in US Dollars cash or Euros cash, with plenty in small denomination notes. No other currencies are widely acceptable and will

attract poor rates of exchange. You should not take travellers cheques as in Iran you can change these in a few banks only, and it is a lengthy procedure. Previously you only had to fill in a currency declaration form if you had a lot of money, under \$6,000 dollars it was not required, however these formalities frequently change. If you do fill in a currency declaration form, then you must obtain exchange receipts of all money transactions whilst in Iran, as this may be checked against the amount declared when you leave the country.

You are allowed to import up to 2,000,000 Rials into Iran but you will find it difficult buying any in the UK.

ATM availability

ATM's are not compatible with western cards in Iran. We would advise that you take enough cash with you and to assume that you will not be able to use an ATM.

WHAT TO TAKE

Essential Equipment and Clothing

This should be read in conjunction with our 'What to Pack' section in the General Information booklet.

No special equipment is needed for this tour, but please note the following: Iran is an Islamic Republic, and **Islamic dress code is a legal requirement**. Women will need to wear a headscarf and baggy trousers and a long top to the knees, or a light, long-sleeved dress over trousers with socks. All over garments must at least reach the knee.

Men must wear long trousers but short sleeve shirts and t-shirts are permissible. **Iran is not a country where you can try to 'get away' with wearing less than is suitable**. You are advised to look for lightweight suitable clothing before you arrive.

You will need the following:

All departures: sunhat; sun-cream; sunglasses with neck string; water bottle; day-sack; waterproofs; sturdy trainers or lightweight walking boots as the terrain can be quite tricky in some areas; swimming costume, towel and sandals.

November - May: warm clothes for evenings; gloves, hats, waterproof jacket.

Baggage and Baggage Allowance

The luggage allowance on the flights to and from London is 20kg, with a maximum of 2 bags per passenger. If you are booking other flights please check luggage allowances shown on your tickets.

You may bring your belongings in a suitcase, holdall or rucksack. One moderately sized soft holdall (such as an Exodus kitbag, measuring approximately 70cm long x 30cm square) should be ample for your baggage.

Exodus kitbags are available for purchase at £25, which includes postage, packaging and VAT. Please note that they are only available to anyone with a UK address.

In the unlikely event of any of your luggage being misplaced or damaged, a Property Irregularity Report (PIR) must be filed with the appropriate airline if you subsequently wish to make a claim against the airline or on your travel insurance. This must be done at the airport where your baggage arrived, or should have arrived.

As advice regarding luggage allowances for both hand and hold luggage is subject to change, we suggest you check www.baa.com and/or the airline's website for the latest information prior to your departure.

READING LIST

Reading List

The Rough Guide to Turkey

Edition 6, ISBN 1843536064.

Lifting the Veil

John Simpson & Tira Shurbart (Coronet Paperbacks 1995)

Recently published excellent book on contemporary Iran, based on extensive visits and many interviews with Iranians of all backgrounds.

The Road to Oxiana

Robert Byron (Penguin)

Archaeological ramblings through Iran in the 1930s. Widely regarded as one of the finest travel books ever written, and very entertaining.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL CLIENTS

Please note that Exodus operate a 24 hour duty office for emergencies, which can be contacted on 0044 (0) 1582 644 100.

Anytime that you travel abroad you should take the time to read the warnings in the essential information in the brochure or at www.exodus.co.uk/about-exodus/essential-information?

Full joining instructions including local emergency numbers, and details of how to reach the start point, will be sent to you approximately 2 to 3 weeks prior to departure. If you do not receive these at least a week before departure, or require them earlier please contact our office or your travel agent.

Occasionally, as stated in our brochure, it may not be possible to follow the itinerary as planned. This may be for a variety of reasons – climatic, political, physical or other. In these circumstances we will make the best alternative arrangements possible that maintain the integrity of the original itinerary.

The information in these Trip Notes is given in good faith, and covers the average range of conditions likely to be found on this trip. Where differences exist in the information between these Trip Notes and our current brochure, the Trip Notes are the correct version and supersede the brochure. Abnormal conditions or other events beyond our control can prevail at any time, particularly in remote or off the beaten track destinations, therefore all holidays can be subject to unexpected changes; in order to enjoy them you should be prepared to be flexible where necessary.

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HOW TO BOOK YOUR TRIP

1. Check availability Go online to check availability, or contact us by phone or email.

2. Secure your place You can provisionally hold a place on this trip, usually for between three and seven days.

3. Complete your Booking Form and Payment You have the choice of completing the booking form at the back of one of our brochures or the online version on our website. Payment details can easily be taken over the phone, alternatively you can provide them on the booking form or send us a cheque.

Book with confidence Exodus is fully licensed and bonded as a tour operator. We hold Air Traffic Organisers Licence (ATOL) number 2582 issued and bonded with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). We are also bonded to the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and we are members of the Federation of Tour Operators (FTO). This means you can book your Exodus holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected.