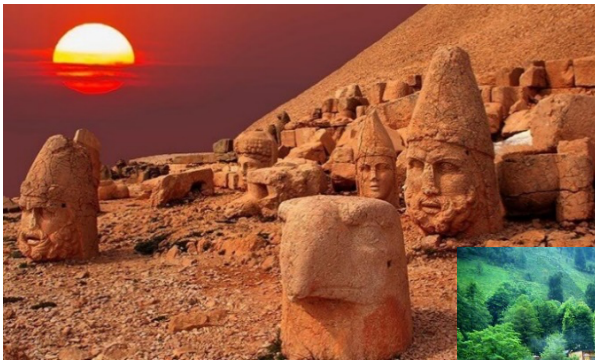


TURKEY AT ITS BESTSM

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VERY-OFF-THE-BEATEN-PATH TOUR OF TURKEYSM

An immersive, rustic travel experience in the land “where it all began” – the birthplace of religions – featuring culinary offerings, history, agriculture, sustainability, and local traditions



HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- Visit some of the earliest continuously inhabited cities of the world
- Stay at unique properties - including an old caravanserai built on the ancient Silk Road, a stone mansion dating back hundreds of years, and a hotel converted from a Russian Palace, among other one-of-a-kind places
- Experience the sites and tastes of Gaziantep, one of the 'UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy' in Turkey
- Learn out about the beginnings of religion in Göbeklitepe – the world's oldest temple
- Visit other UNESCO World Heritage sites such as Mt. Nemrut and Ani
- Explore the world's best Mosaics Museum and other unique cultural and educational centers
- Visit ancient Jewish, Orthodox Christian, Assyrian, Armenian and Muslim religious sites
- Spend time with villagers and learn about ages-old crafts, such as cheese making
- Witness the "Whistle Language", an ancient form of communication still used in remote Black Sea villages
- Meet and learn the stories of incredible local women who are making a difference in their communities
- Watch the traditional equestrian and military Turkish sport, Cirit

DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 1: ARRIVAL IN GAZIANTEP

You will be arriving at Istanbul International Airport. [Please note: citizens of certain countries will need to have a Turkish Visa, which can easily be obtained online at www.evisa.gov.tr. The current cost at the time of this document is \$50 for US citizens, and \$60 for Canadians and Australians].

Transfer to your flight to Gaziantep. Upon arrival in Gaziantep, your guide will meet you at the airport and transfer you to *Sirehan Hotel* (or similar).

DAY 2: GAZIANTEP

Gaziantep (or Antep) is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. It has a history dating back to the Paleolithic Period and is home to Hittite, Roman, Byzantine, Seljuk and Ottoman heritages.



Due to its special location on the Silk Road, the city had grown rapidly after it passed under Ottoman reign in 1516. During this period, the city became a center where not only goods and money but also beliefs, traditions, thoughts, and scientific knowledge were exchanged.

Gaziantep is the culinary capital of Turkey and is also the center of pistachio cultivation in the country. It is renowned for its baklavas that are claimed to be the best in the world and may very well have originated there. It is a Turkish delicacy that is officially protected by the European Union as to its origin. There are also expansive olive groves and vineyards in the area.

The scope of Gaziantep cuisine alone is much bigger than the entire French cuisine; there are at least 150 eggplant recipes alone!

Besides the cuisine, the handicrafts of this area are also important: Copper and mother-of-pearl artisans, jewelry and “yemeni” (colored leather shoes) making are still ongoing within the traditional master-apprentice relationship, handed down from father to son and to grandson.

The city is the educational center of the region with its four universities. The first Culinary Museum, housed in an old mansion, is in Gaziantep.



Fairs, such as the International Gaziantep Pistachio Culture and Art Festival, are organized annually



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You will visit one of the most beautiful and famous museums in the world, **Zeugma Mosaic Museum**, in Gaziantep. This museum exhibits superb mosaics discovered at the ancient Roman site of Zeugma before the Birecik Dam flooded most of the site; it is the second largest mosaic museum in the world. The most famous piece is “Mosaic of the “Gypsy Woman”, whose eyes follow you as you walk in front of her.



Due to its location near an easy crossing of the Euphrates River, Zeugma was an important center of the Kommagene Kingdom, and is now a World Heritage Site. The Roman Empire occupied Zeugma, and established a garrison there, in the 2nd Century BC. Its location on the Silk Road helped to promote the development of commerce and the arts; the city continued to grow and prosper, and had a population of over 80,000 people, making it one of the largest cities at the time, until it was destroyed by the Persians in the 2nd Century A.D. An international effort in 2000 rescued a rich trove of mosaics from the site prior to the flooding of the area by the waters of a new dam on the Euphrates River. Zeugma's significance derives from its Roman villas that boast floors decorated with mosaics; only a small portion of these villas have been unearthed. These terraced villas, the likes of which in Turkey are only seen in antique Ephesus, are archaeologically very significant.



You will also visit the Old City Castle in the center of the city, first built by the Hittites as an observation point and then restored by the Romans. Then, see the Copper Bazaar. It is one of the most special and oldest bazaars in Turkey, where you can find a variety of copper items handcrafted by many generations of artisans.

At the historical Tepebasi district, another World Heritage Site, you will see fine examples of Southeastern Anatolian architecture from the mid 19th Century.

Overnight stay will be at *Sirehan Hotel* (or similar).
(Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)

DAY 3: GÖBEKLITEPE / ŞANLIURFA

After an early breakfast, you will be driven to **Şanlıurfa**, ancient **Edessa**, a city that has been lived in since the Babylonians, followed by the Hurrites, Hittites, Assyrians, and many other peoples.



Today, you will be experiencing other amazing places, including a nice boat ride on the lake behind **Birecik Dam**. The waters of Birecik Dam have submerged the entire valley where once gardens had flourished. You will be able to see the canyon and the **Rumkale Fortress**, which reveal different settlements from the times of the Hittites, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Romans and the Arabs, and others in succession. St. John is believed to have founded a Christian settlement in Rumkale. We will also see the beautiful **Halfeti Mosque**, which is now being salvaged before it is totally submerged in water.

After lunch, continue on to **Göbeklitepe**, a hilltop sanctuary erected on the highest point of an elongated mountain ridge some 15 kms northeast of the town of Urfa, which is going to amaze you!

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What makes Göbeklitepe unique are the date it was built and how it was built. You will be seeing remains of the earliest temples ever discovered, about 12,000 years old, predating Stonehenge and the pyramids by thousands of years, from times before the inventions of agriculture, pottery, and the wheel!

The structures are primarily round or oval megalithic

buildings; there were at least 7 circular buildings, of which 4 have been excavated. Geomagnetic data suggests that at least 16 more buildings, along with 200 or more T-shaped columns, are still buried on the site. Nearby quarries have even more pillars that were left, still in the process of production.



Next, visit one of the best museums you will see: The new **Şanlıurfa Archaeological Museum**. The museum can be toured in a chronological order from prehistoric ages to the present. Among the most interesting works exhibited in the museum are 'Urfa Man', regarded as the world's oldest statue, the exact replica of the Temple D at Göbeklitepe, and the cult site, referred to as Nevalı Çori, which was submerged by the Atatürk Dam and moved into this museum with its original stones.



Afterwards, spend some time to see the highlights of this very interesting city, mentioned in the **Old Testament**.

Urfa is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities, going back to 10,000 years ago. Being on the Silk Road and located between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, ancient Edessa was an important trading center, with an early Christian community starting around 200 A.D. Hurrians, Hittites, Egyptians, Assyrians, Alexander the Great, and many others have conquered, or passed through, Urfa; Alexander named it Edessa.

It is called the "Prophets' City" as several prophets mentioned in the Old Testament had lived there. It is also believed by some to be the birthplace of Abraham (when the city was known

as **Ur of Chaldees**), from where he decided to move to the land of Canaan.

Visit some of the highlights such as **Abraham's Birth Cave**, a place of pilgrimage for Moslems, and the complex of mosques and medreses (schools) built and rebuilt over the centuries.



Then, you will see **El Rahman Mosque** and **pools of the "Sacred Carp"**, a natural aquarium with its special fish, surrounded by century-old trees.

According to legend, King Nimrod had a dream; when he woke up, he described his dream to soothsayers who said, "A child born this year will end your reign". Upon hearing this, Nimrod ordered all male children born that year to be killed. But, the wife of palace's idol-maker, Azer, secretly gave birth to a child, Abraham, in this cave. Abraham lived in the cave for 7 years, without ever setting foot outside. The



spring near where Prophet Abraham was born is believed to have healing powers that cure many diseases.

Once Nimrod found out about Abraham, he had Abraham thrown into a fire from **Urfa's citadel** because Abraham was trying to convert Nimrod's people to monotheism and breaking the idols that they worshipped. That is when God ordered "Oh fire, be merciful to Abraham, and do not burn him"; so, the fire turned into water, and the firewood (or burning coal) into fish. The body of water into which The Prophet Abraham fell is known as "**Lake Halil-ur Rahman**". At the same time, Zeliha, Nimrod's adopted daughter who was in love with Abraham, threw herself into the fire as she could not stand to see her lover burn. The spot where she landed is known as Lake Ayni Zeliha.

Overnight stay will be at the *Hotel El-Ruha* (or similar).
(Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)

DAY 4: URFA / MT. NEMRUT



After breakfast, your guide will show you more of Urfa.

Enjoy a walk through the **Covered Bazaar of Şanlıurfa**. The Bazaar with its *Gümrük Hani* (Customs Building) was built by the great Ottoman Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent in 1563 as a Customs Post and a distribution point for goods on this section of the Silk Road. You might want to just sit under a shade and watch the goings on of the market-traders and passersby. Most of the shopkeepers are 4th or 5th generation artisans, using the same store locations.



After lunch, you will be driven to Adiyaman, with a stop at **Atatürk Dam**, the world's fourth largest dam and the centerpiece of the **Southern Anatolian Project (GAP)** - a collection of massive hydro-electric and irrigation projects on the upper reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.



Now comes one of the highlights of your tour: A **Sunset Visit to Mt. Nemrut** to see the colossal statues of gods of antiquity, scattered on an artificial summit at an elevation of about 7,000 feet. Mount Nemrut has also been selected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We owe this amazing site to a megalomaniac king, Antiochus I Ephiphanes of the **Commagene Kingdom**. The Commagene Kingdom was founded in 69 BC. Ancestors of the founder, Mithridathes Kalinikos, are traced back to the Macedonian leader Alexander the Great and the Persian King Darius. 'Kommagene' means "unity of genes" in Greek, referring to the unity of different societies from the lineages of Parthians and the Scythians in the region. Antiochus had three enormous terraces cut into the mountaintop and decorated them with colossal statues of himself and both Greek and Persian gods of the kingdom, and the summit became a sanctuary where the King was worshipped.

On top of the center of the flat peak, an artificial hill was built of crushed rock; it had a diameter of 492 feet and rose another 164 feet above the mountain summit. The King's tomb, and those of three female relatives, may well lie beneath those tons of rock.



On your way up to the hilltop, you will also see the **Tumulus of Karakus (Tomb of Women)**; located near **Adiyaman-Kahta**, it was built by King Mithridates II as the resting place for three female members of the royal family. It is known as the Karakus (blackbird) Mound due to the statue of an eagle located atop a column.

Our program also includes a visit to **Cendere Koprusu (Cendere Bridge)**, located on **Cendere Stream** – a tributary of **Kahta River** – spanning between two rocks on either side of the stream at a point where the stream narrows; it is a single span structure in perfect condition, and according to the inscription on the columns of the bridge, it was built between 198 and 200 CE by the Roman Legion XVI.



Overnight stay will be in Adiyaman at the *Nemrut Euphrat Hotel*, a charming little village hotel (or similar). (Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)

DAY 5: DIYARBAKIR / MARDIN



At about 8:30 a.m. you will depart from Mt. Nemrut and start on your drive to through the very ancient lands of biblical times to **Diyarbakir** (ancient Amida), where the Tigris River flows by massive basalt city walls that encircle the old town. Diyarbakir has a history that goes back thousands of years. You will see two of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites today at **Diyarbakir Fortress** and **Hevsel Gardens**.

Located on the Upper Tigris River Basin that is part of the Fertile Crescent, the fortified city of Diyarbakir and the landscape around it have been important from the Hellenistic period onward, through the Roman, Sassanid, Byzantine, Islamic and Ottoman times to the present.

The site includes the Inner Castle, known as İçkale (including the Amida Mound). The 5.8 km (3.6 mile) long black basalt city walls of Diyarbakir with their numerous towers, gates, buttresses in different shapes and sizes, including 63 inscriptions, are the largest and tallest in the world and the second-longest after the Great Wall of China. The oldest parts were built by Romans, and you can still see Latin inscription at one of the gates.



Hevsel Gardens, a green link between the city and the Tigris River supplied the city with food and water. Numerous springs emerge from beneath the basalt rock, and the gardens are divided into five terraces above the present Tigris floodplain. The gardens, regarded as sacred because of their important provisioning role, have been compared to the Garden of Eden.

If time permits, visit the **Mithraeum in Zerzevan Castle**, one of the best-preserved temples of the Mithras cult in the world a mystery religion that originated in ancient Persia.

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After seeing the Ten-Eyed Bridge and visiting beautiful Ulu Mosque, which was built in 1179, continue to **Mardin**, a city that exhibits Arab flavors as well as Turkish. It is the center of Jacobites, a community of Syrian Orthodox Christians whose church services are still conducted in Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke.

The history of Mardin is incredible – the city has spanned across the Subari, Sumerian, Babylonian, Mitanean, Assyrian, Persian, Roman, Byzantine, Omayyad, Abbasid, Hamdani, Seljuki, Artukian, Karakoyunlu, Akkoyunlu, Safavid, and Ottoman periods.



Located on a high hill overlooking the plain of Southern Turkey, Syria, and Mesopotamia, Mardin is on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List. It is a unique town where one would get the impression that time has stood still.

The local creamy white limestone has been used in the town's architecture, hand-carved like embroidery, making **Mardin Houses** so famous today. The entire city is an architectural treasure. Looking down from the terraces or the restaurants to the south of the main street, one can see the plain take on different colors at various times of the day. That is a visual feast, as well as a cultural and culinary one.

You will visit **Mardin Museum**, where one can see the oldest toy found in the world, going back to 5,500 B.C., among many other interesting artifacts. There you will be able to see the artisans work on their craft, continuing a tradition spanning generations, interact with them, and support them.



Dinner will be served at one of Mardin's best restaurants for a feast of traditional *mezes* and Syriac wine tasting.

Overnight stay will be at the *Gazi Konagi* in Mardin (or similar).
(Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)

DAY 6: MARDIN

After breakfast, there will be visits to the **Sultan Kasim Medresesi** (a school from 1,385 AD) and Mardin's current **Post Office**, a restored Mardin family home, as well as to the **Mardin Citadel**, also known as "The Eagle's Nest."



Then, drive to the Syrian Orthodox monastery of **Deyr-ul-Zaferan** (Saffron Monastery), which is about 1,600 years old and has 365 rooms; it is named after saffron, which is abundant in the region.



The first inhabitants of the monastery, the Aramaics, were sun worshippers, and for 4000 years they held a ceremony at each sunrise, offering sacrifices. It is also believed that the first school of medicine was established here.

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Afterwards, drive to the ancient city of **Dara**, located about 30 km from Mardin, on the Syrian border. Dara was an especially important ancient city on the Silk Road. It was established as a settlement in the 6th Century BCE by the order of Iranian ruler Darius, and later became an important East Roman fortress city.

The remains of the ancient city of Dara are spread over a large area, mostly carved into rocks. It is a typical Roman city with interesting

cave houses, rock tombs and churches, a necropolis, cisterns, bridges, strong city walls, an agora, a dungeon, a cannon foundry, and the dam. All one can see today is only about 20% of the ancient city; the rest is awaiting to be excavated (just like Ephesus).



Dara was one of Mesopotamia's most important trade centers for centuries, and among others, it witnessed the war between Persian Emperor Darius and Alexander the Great. You will return to your hotel in Mardin for your overnight stay. (Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)

DAY 7: MARDIN / VAN



After an early breakfast in Mardin, your guide will start your drive to Van. In about an hour you will be reaching the ancient town of **Midyat**, which has a rich history going back to the 3rd Millennium BCE. Many kingdoms/empires had ruled Midyat, including the Hurrians (also known as Mitannis), Assyrians, Arameans, Armenians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, (Eastern and Western) Romans, Abbasids, Seljuk Turks and Ottomans. The population of Midyat had been predominantly Assyrian (Syriac) Christians; some Christians still remain, but there are more Arabs and Kurds at the present time. Assyrian Christians in Midyat have been making wine for millennia with grapes native to the region. Midyat is famous for its handcrafted filigree silver jewelry, called Telkari.

You will see **Mor Gabriel**, one of the well-preserved monasteries; founded in 397 A.D. it is one of the oldest. Church services are still held in Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke.

The neighboring **Tur Abdin** region is considered as the heartland of the Assyrians; there are still nine churches there, some of which are no longer in use today. The most famous is the **Church of Mother of God** in the town of Anitli; it was built during the time of Justinian II in the 5th Century and was later expanded; now it is a monastery within a walled compound with a large inner court. Its colonnaded tower and intricate stone-carvings are definitely worth a visit.



Then, you will take a drive to **Hasankeyf**, an ancient city by the Tigris River which is submerged under the waters of a new dam on the Tigris. Hasankeyf may be one of the oldest continuously inhabited settlements in the world, spanning some 10,000 years. Hasankeyf and its surrounding limestone cliffs were home to thousands of human-made caves, hundreds of medieval monuments, and a unique canyon ecosystem—all combining to create a unique open-air museum. When the controversial dam was erected, a new town of Hasankeyf was built on the other side of the river.

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Afterwards, continue to Van via **Batman** (with its oil fields), **Tatvan** and **Gevas**.

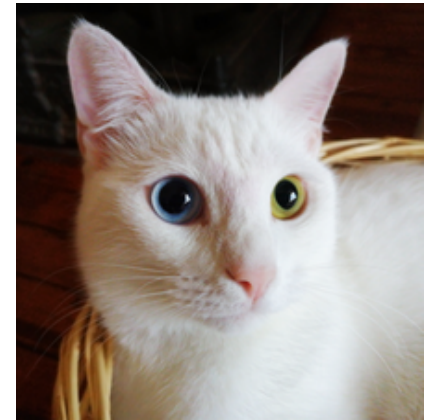
Overnight stay will be at the *Doubletree by Hilton* (or similar) in Van.
(Breakfast)

DAY 8: AKDAMAR ISLAND / VAN



After breakfast, you will drive to **Akdamar Island**, located about 3 kms from the shore, where you will be able to see the beautifully restored 10th Century Armenian **Church of the Holy Cross** (Sourp Khach). The Cathedral stands atop this serene island on Lake Van. Although the cathedral has been converted to a museum, its religious heritage is still unmistakable.

The Cathedral of the Holy Cross was renovated faithfully to its original structure. The portrayal of David and Goliath is among the extensive array of bas relief carvings that adorn the external walls.



Afterwards, continue to the Eastern part of Van, and see the famous **Van Cats** with different colored eyes of blue and yellow.



The day will end with a visit to the 3,000-year-old **Citadel of Van** to watch the sunset over lake Van.

The fortress of Van is a massive stone fortification built by the ancient **Kingdom of Urartu** at about 1000 B.C. It overlooks Tushpa, the capital of the Urartian Kingdom.

In 331 BC, Tushpa was conquered by Alexander the Great, and after his death became part of the Seleucid Empire; afterwards, it was ruled by several Empires like the rest of this region.

Royal rock tombs, monumental open-air sanctuaries and palaces are the most prominent architectural features of the capital. Many cuneiform inscriptions (either on rock surfaces or on stelae) shed light on the history of the city. The citadel has been adapted and added on to almost continually ever since by Assyrians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Armenians, Turkomen, Seljuks, Ottomans and for a brief period during WWI, the Russians. This fortress is possibly the oldest continuously used military fortification in the world. The highway between the lake and the city is part of the ancient Silk Road.

Overnight stay will be in Van.
(Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)



DAY 9: VAN

Today's focus will be to see and experience a lot, but at a slower pace than the prior day.



After breakfast, visit Urartu Carpets where beautiful carpets and kilims are woven by members of a local Women's Collective.

And then head on to Gevaş for a **traditional local feast** in a local country garden, where everybody will participate in **food preparation and enjoy the lunch they have helped to cook.**



In the afternoon, pay a visit to the brand new **Van Urartu Museum**, opened in its new location in 2020 and housing great finds from the Urartian Kingdom. It is one of the largest archaeological museums in Turkey, located close to the Castle. Urartu people excelled in metal work, especially in jewelry.



There is also a mysterious collection – a group of stelae, discovered for the first time in 1998, that had been created by a previously unknown civilization, never seen before in Anatolia or in the Near East. Hewn from a hard local stone, the **Hakkâri stelae**, numbering 13, range from about 28 inches to more than 10 feet in height. Chiseled into one surface of each of the slabs is a frontal view of the upper part of a human figure (the legs are not represented). The faces with round eye sockets, some still inlaid with white stone, and small, closed mouths with an expressionless, cold demeanor. They were found exactly how they were originally built and placed. Eleven of these are male figures, and the carvings are very similar to those found in Central Asia.



Overnight stay will be in Van.
(Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)

DAY 10: DOĞUBAYAZIT / MT. ARARAT / KARS

You will depart Van, after enjoying another famous Van breakfast, for **Doğubayazıt** via Muradiye and the beautiful **Muradiye Water Falls** on the Bendimahi River, driving past Mt. Suphan and across Tendurek Shield Volcano.



In about two hours, you will reach Doğubayazıt and visit the spectacular **Ishak Paşa Palace**, overlooking the plains of Ararat. Built over an entire century, starting in 1685, this sprawling pleasure palace of the Pasha has survived for about 400 years. Situated near the Iranian border, the architectural design of the palace is a mixture of Anatolian, Iranian and North Mesopotamian traditions. The palace had a great array of facilities, including a bakery, a mosque, dungeons and even a Harem. The whole place had a central heating system, probably the first such building in the world.

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Standing proudly on top of a bluff in Turkey, this abandoned Ottoman palace looks like it could be from the set of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. It is on the UNESCO Tentative List of World Heritage Sites.



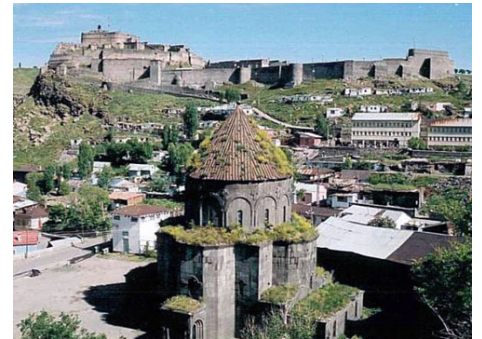
The journey north will be around the Western edge of **Mt. Ararat**. Mt. Ararat is probably the most famous mountain in the world, being the landing place of Noah's Ark. The name Ararat derives from the Bible (Jeremiah 51:27) and is a transliteration of 'Urartu' the name foreigners gave to this region and its inhabitants in Biblical times.

Then, continue your drive to **Kars** set on a high plateau dominated by a forbidding **citadel** that was built in 1579. Below the castle is an Armenian church known as Surb Arak'elots, the **Church of the Holy Apostles**.

Built in the 930s, it has a square with four semicircular apses covered by a conical roof. The church housed a museum in the 1960s–70s and was converted to a mosque in 1993.

Imperial Russia occupied Kars in 1878 and held it until 1920, which accounts for Kars having some Russian-style buildings. The region produces some of the best butter and honey in Turkey.

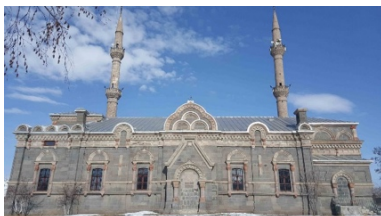
Overnight stay will be in Kars at the *Hotel Katerina Palace* (or similar).
(Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)



DAY 11: ANI / KARS



Ani, former capital of the great medieval Armenian Kingdom (between 961 and 1045), is only about 30 miles to the East on the Turkish-Armenian border. You will spend the morning to see the magnificent remains of this capital city, built on a secluded triangular plateau overlooking a ravine. It was once one of the cultural and commercial centers on the Silk Road. Ani combines residential, religious, and military structures built over the centuries by Christian and Muslim dynasties. Religious monuments of Zoroastrian, Christian and Muslim origins exhibit different architectural traditions.



In the afternoon, visit the small **Kars Museum** that has archaeological and ethnographical exhibits, and the 12th Century **Kars Citadel**. Right by the citadel is the **Museum of Apostles**, which was once a church before it was converted to a mosque.



A visit to the **Kosapinar Village**, where the villagers rent their homes as part of "Farm Tourism" might be fun. You can feed the chicken, or visit the stables, cut wood, go on horseback riding with the villagers.

But the most fun and unusual activity to watch will be the game of "**Cirit**" (or Cavgan), which is a traditional Turkish equestrian team sport that is played outdoors on horseback, where the objective is to score points by throwing a blunt javelin at opposing horsemen. Turks brought this tradition with them from



Central Asia as they moved to Anatolia. The horse was a sacred animal and indispensable. This sport is now becoming endangered, so our support of the games is important.

Kars is also very famous for its duck recipes. Tonight, enjoy that delicious meal at a famous Kars restaurant. (Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)

DAY 12: BOĞATEPE / ISHAN / HOPA / ARTVIN



After breakfast you will start on your drive to Artvin. On the way, you will be stopping at a very interesting village called **Boğatepe**, which deserves a bit more description:

During the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878), the village (like the entire province of Kars) was annexed by the Russian Empire. Russians settled Molokans in the village which was then named Zavot ("Dairy" in Russian Language). After the First World War, the village was returned to Turkey. While some of the Molokans migrated to Soviet Union, Karapapak Turks from Georgia settled in the village. Molokans were cheese producers, and the newcomers also began producing cheese for local consumption. (Malakans were like Amish/Quakers to a great extent. One of their famous benefactors was Tolstoy!)



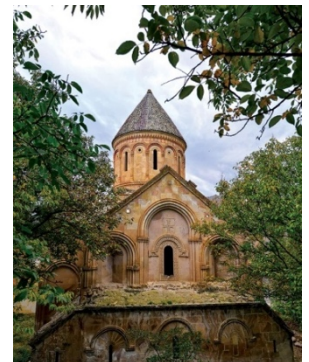
Cheese makers from France and Switzerland came starting with late 1800 and introduced new cheese types, such as Gruyere. What changed the fate of the village was a very tragic traffic accident in 2000 that killed 23 villagers, almost a tenth of the entire village population. People were devastated, and all wanted to leave their village and move to other places. Fortunately, the brother of one of the deceased returned to the village and started to bring it back to life with the help of the remaining villagers, especially the women.



Over 650 varieties of grass and plants grow on the very high plateaus of the region (up to 8,500 feet in elevation). The villagers invited scientists to categorize all of these plants. They opened plant drying facilities. They brought teachers of nutrition and health to learn about their craft. Besides cheese, they are now also known for their honey and organic farming. Most of the villagers rent out their houses to tourists and have them share their life experiences.

Turkey's first cheese museum, **Zayot Eko Museum**, was opened in an abandoned dairy building. It was restored and established as a museum in 2010. You will visit the museum and taste the famous Kars cheese. Amazingly, these cheesemakers use about 1 ½ tons of milk to produce a round of gruyere cheese weighing about 150 pounds. Here is a short video showing how their cheese is made: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eLlg3pkLvY>

Next, continue your drive to Arvin via spectacular Georgian valleys. On the way, visit **Ishan Church** from the 10th Century. It is decorated with beautiful reliefs and is quite an impressive monument. The frescoes in the dome are in good condition, with a cross against a blue background surrounded by 4 seraphim. Beneath the dome are 16 windows and plank arcades showing 8 apostles and 8 local saints.



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Overnight stay will be in Artvin at the *Koru Boutique Hotel* (or similar).
(Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner)

DAY 13: ARTVIN / HOPA / AYDER

After breakfast, start your drive to Hopa, arriving at Firtina (Storm) Valley, one of the most beautiful regions of the Black Sea Coast of Turkey; this will take you to Ayder Plateau, with its beautiful 'Alpine' landscape!



Visit **Canlihemsin**, a town covered by forests and a constant mist of clouds, as well as **Konaklar, Senyuva Bridge, Zil Kale** and **Palovit Falls** (the highest and the most beautiful in the region).



Overnight stay will be at the *Ayder Doga or Doga Resort* (or similar). (Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)

DAY 14: AYDER / RIZE / TRABZON

This morning, visit lovely Ayder. Traditionally dressed village ladies, thermal springs, waterfalls, and lovely houses are indeed very interesting to see.



Then, continue to **Rize** for a short break. Built on a mountain slope and covered with tea bushes, Rize is the center of the tea industry in Turkey. You will see a panoramic view of the city from the Botany Garden.

Next stop is the magnificent setting of the 14th Century **Sumela Monastery**, perched on a cliff face above a deep gorge. Surrounded by the ruins of monks' dwellings, the church is covered with beautiful frescoes. Restorations have now been finished, and you should be able to visit the Monastery.

Afterwards, continue to Trabzon for overnight stay at the *Zorlu Grand* (or similar).
(Breakfast)

Note: Conditions permitting, you will be taken for an exclusive visit of some of the tea plantations and visit with some of the local villagers. Tea is generally harvested in September.

DAY 15: TRABZON

Trabzon, ancient Trapezus, was founded by settlers from the Milesian colony of Sinope, towards the end of the 7th Century B.C. The city walls, first built by the Romans, can still be seen. Trabzon has been a very important port city from its very beginnings until the present times.

In "*Anabasis: Return of the Ten Thousand*" (403 BC), Xenophon described the mountain passes, routes, and local customs of this region in great detail. It is a city that reflects thousands of years of history through its narrow cobblestone pavements. Silk Road caravans loaded their goods onto ships in Trabzon. Even Marco Polo stayed there (and reportedly lost his entire

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belongings!) After the Fourth Crusade, when the Crusaders seized and sacked Constantinople, the imperial family of Comneni escaped to Trabzon and founded a new kingdom, which lasted until 1461 when the Ottomans conquered the area. Trabzon is not only a beautiful city, but it is also like an open-air museum.



The restored 13th Century Byzantine Church, **Hagia Sophia of Trabzon**, was used as a mosque for centuries and now is the **Ayasofya Museum**. It is the jewel of Trabzon, with its splendid frescoes and some of the finest examples of Byzantine paintings.



Drive to remarkable **Kuşköy (Bird Village)** located on top of a high mountain. The village is inhabited by farmers who raise tea, corn, beets, and other crops, and keep livestock. ‘Whistle Language’ is a method of communication that uses whistling to simulate and articulate words. The practice developed because of the steep mountains and rugged topography of the region that required the local population to find an alternative way to communicate across long distances.

UNESCO has accepted the “bird language” of Black Sea villagers as an endangered part of world heritage in need of urgent protection, and it is now on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. One of the key threats to the practice is the use of mobile phones. The new generation’s interest in whistled language has diminished considerably, and there is a risk that this element will be gradually torn from its natural environment. We want to support this village so that they can continue their 400-year-old tradition.



Overnight stay will be in Trabzon, with a final Farewell Dinner.
(Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner)

DAY 16: DEPARTURE

Today you will be transferred to Trabzon Airport for your flight to Istanbul and connect to your international flight.
(Breakfast)

~ *END OF SERVICES* ~

SUMMARIZED ITINERARY

DAY 1: GAZIANTEP

- Arrival in Gaziantep, after a plane change in Istanbul.

DAY 2: GAZIANTEP

- City tour in this Culinary Capital of Turkey
- Visit the best Mosaics Museum in the world, Zeugma

DAY 3: SANLIURFA

- Boat ride on Bilecek Dam to see Rumkale and Halfeti Mosque half-submerged in waters
- Visit GÖBEKLITEPE, the oldest temple ever built dating back 12,000 years ago
- Şanlıurfa Archaeological Museum visit
- Birth Cave of Abraham
- Pools of the Sacred Carp

DAY 4: MT. NEMRUT

- Covered Bazaar of Şanlıurfa
- Atatürk Dam, world's fourth largest dam
- Mt. Nemrut to see the colossal statues during sunset

DAY 5: MARDIN

- Visit Diyarbakir Fortress and Hevsel Gardens
- See Mardin, a beautiful city with stone buildings
- Mardin Museum

DAY 6: MARDIN

- Mardin Castle
- Deyr-ul-Zaferan (Saffron Monastery) from the 4th Century where Aramaic is still spoken
- Dara ruins – an ancient city on the Silk Road

DAY 7: VAN

- Midyat, an ancient city with layers of civilization famous for its silver filigree jewelry
- 12,000-year-old village of Hasankeyf slowly submerging under water

DAY 8: VAN

- Akdamar Island in Lake Van
- Beautiful Armenian Church of Holy Cross
- Van Citadel
- Ancient Tushpa, capital of the Urartu Kingdom

DAY 9: VAN

- Lunch with villages in Gevaş
- Women's Urartu carpet collective
- Van Urartu Museum

DAY 10: KARS

- Ishak Paşa Palace in Doğubeyazıt
- Mt. Ararat (some believe the place of Noah's Ark)
- Kars Castle

DAY 11: KARS

- Ani, former capital of the ancient Armenian Kingdom
- Koşapınar village, practicing "Farm Tourism"
- Watch "Cirit" one of the oldest sports coming with the Turks all the way from Central Asia (similar to Polo)

DAY 12: ARTVIN

- Boğatepe Village, cheese center of Turkey with an interesting history and run especially by women
- Visit the Cheese Museum
- Drive through spectacular Georgian valleys, dotted with lovely churches

DAY 13: AYDER

- Drive through the most beautiful coastline of the Black Sea
- See the Ayder plateau covered by forests and constant mist of clouds

DAY 14: TRABZON

- Stop at Rize, center of tea plantations
- Visit 14th Century Sümela Monastery, perched on a cliff face

DAY 15: TRABZON

- City tour
- A visit to the Kuşköy (Bird Village) to hear the locals communicate with a whistling language

DAY 16: DEPARTURE

- Transfer to Trabzon Airport for Istanbul where you can connect to your next destination.

FEATURED VISITS

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

- ◇ Mt. Nemrut
- ◇ Göbeklitepe
- ◇ Diyarbakir
- ◇ Ani
- ◇ Akdamar Church
- ◇ Zeugma
- ◇ Harran and Sanliurfa
- ◇ Ishak Paşa Palace
- ◇ Churches and Monasteries of Midyat
- ◇ Mardin Cultural Landscape
- ◇ Sümela Monastery
- ◇ The Malabadi Bridge Diyarbakir
- ◇ The Underground Water Structures in Gaziantep
- ◇ Van Fortress, the Mound and the Old City of Van
- ◇ Zeynel Abidin Mosque Complex and Mor Yakup Church, Mardin
- ◇ Zerzevan Castle and Mithraeum, Diyarbakir

UNESCO CITY OF GASTRONOMY

- ◇ Gaziantep

OTHER CULTURAL HERITAGE EXPERIENCES

- ◇ *Whistled language* of Kuşköy

IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT THIS TOUR

- This tour provides immersive opportunities to learn, support the economies of small villages, encourage the continuation of ancient traditions, and make a positive impact on locals. We hope you will return as a richer person for the experience.
- Please note that the area of Turkey that we are covering in this tour is not the most developed; so, please expect authentic-yet-comfortable accommodations and restaurants – not necessarily luxury.
- Guests should be physically in good shape to maximize their experiences on this tour; there will be a lot of walking, sometimes uphill such as on Mt. Nemrut or at the hotel in Ayder.
- The tour will travel through some conservative areas; alcohol may not be served in some towns and villages.
- Not all guests will have the same category of room at each hotel, as we are using small, authentic, hotels with limited capacity. We will try to make sure that each guest will have a chance of staying in better rooms throughout the trip.

PACKAGE DETAILS

PACKAGE INCLUDES

- All tours on a private basis English-speaking professional guides
- Chauffeur-driven air-conditioned vehicles
- All parking fees and tolls
- All entrance fees
- Two-night accommodation at Sirehan Hotel in Gaziantep
- One-night accommodation at Hotel el Ruha in Şanlıurfa
- One-night accommodation at Euphrate Hotel in Adiyaman
- Two-night accommodation at Gazi Konağı in Mardin
- Three-night accommodation in Doubletree by Hilton in Van
- Two-night accommodation at Katerina Palace in Kars
- One-night accommodation at Koru Botique Hotel in Artvin
- One-night accommodation at Ayder Doğa Resort in Ayder
- Two-night accommodation at Zorlu Grand Hotel in Trabzon
- Daily breakfast at all hotels
- All lunches and dinners
- Cooking Class in Gevas
- Boat to Akdamar Island
- Cirit Show in Kars
- All taxes

PACKAGE DOES NOT INCLUDE

- International or Domestic Flights
- Turkish Visa
- Drinks other than Bottled Water
- Items of a personal nature
- Gratuities to guides and drivers
- Trip Cancellation or other Insurance

Note: maximum group size is 14 guests