

TURKEY AT ITS BESTSM

AN IDEAL PRE-CRUISE EXPERIENCESM: ISTANBUL & CAPPADOCIA



HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- Visit the world-famous sites of Istanbul, like the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque
- Cruise on the Bosphorus in a private boat, sailing between Asia and Europe
- Shop in the most famous bazaars in the world, including the Covered Bazaar and Spice Bazaar
- Visit the unique valleys of Cappadocia and take walking tours
- Enjoy a hot-air balloon ride above the lunar-like landscape of Cappadocia

ITINERARY

DAY 1: ISTANBUL

Arrive at Istanbul Airport.

After passport control and luggage collection, proceed to Exit #8 where your local host will be waiting with a sign bearing your name to transfer you to your selected hotel.

DAY 2: ISTANBUL

Your guide will meet you in the lobby of your hotel to begin a full-day exploration of some of Istanbul's most iconic and historic landmarks, starting in the heart of the old city: **Sultanahmet**.



Your first stop is the magnificent **Blue Mosque**, famous for its six elegant minarets and a dazzling interior decorated with over 20,000 hand-painted blue Iznik tiles.

Next, stroll through the ancient **Hippodrome**, once the site of a grand Byzantine stadium. Today, it is a lively square adorned with fascinating monuments such as the Serpent Column from Delphi, the Egyptian Obelisk from the Temple of Karnak, and the ornate German Fountain.



Continue to the architectural marvel of **Hagia Sophia**, built in the 6th century as the world's largest church. It later became a mosque, then a museum, and today once again



serves as a mosque. Inside, admire its exquisite mosaics and precious marbles, including columns sourced from the Temple of Artemis - one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Next, stop for lunch (not included)

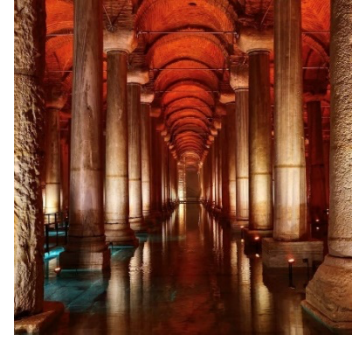
Recommended venues: Avlu Restaurant at the Four Seasons Sultanahmet, Deraliye, or another option your guide may suggest.

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Afterwards, descend into the hauntingly beautiful **Basilica Cistern**, the largest of Istanbul's ancient underground reservoirs. Built in the 6th Century, it is supported by 336 majestic Corinthian columns. This unique site has been featured in countless movies including the James Bond film *From Russia with Love*.



Conclude the day with a visit to the world-renowned **Grand Bazaar**, one of the oldest and largest covered markets in the world with over 4,000 shops spread across 12 buildings. Explore its vibrant alleys, historic fountains, mosques, hammams, and charming cafes. With countless treasures, it is a truly shopper's paradise as well as a unique cultural experience.

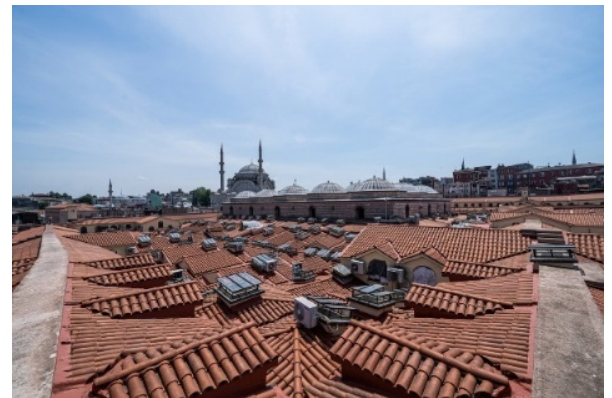


Optional Afternoon Activity:

For a unique perspective, enjoy a guided rooftop walk above the Grand Bazaar. This 20-minute experience takes you along the same paths used in the famous James Bond chase scene in the movie *Skyfall*. This walk offers panoramic views of the city's iconic domes, minarets, and waterways – including both the Bosphorus and Golden Horn - alongside its modern skyline.

Note: Not recommended for those with mobility issues or vertigo.

Your guide will return you to your hotel in the afternoon.
(Meals included: Breakfast)



DAY 3: ISTANBUL

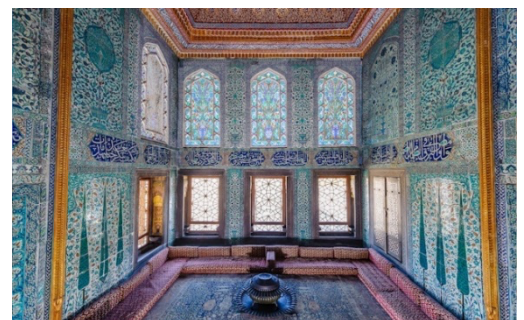
At 9:00 a.m., your guide will meet you for another full day of sightseeing.



Begin at the magnificent **Topkapi Palace**, the opulent residence of Ottoman sultans for centuries. Perched at the tip of the historic peninsula where Constantinople was originally founded, this grand palace became the administrative heart of the Ottoman Empire following its conquest in 1453.

Explore its famed Treasury, home to dazzling artifacts such as

the legendary Topkapi Dagger and the exquisite Kaşıkçı (Spoonmaker's) Diamond, as well as one of the world's finest collection of Chinese and Japanese porcelain.



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Next, visit the historic **Spice Bazaar (Egyptian Bazaar)**. Built in the 17th century, it is one of Istanbul's oldest and most vibrant markets, second in size only to the Grand Bazaar.

Wander through the 88 vaulted halls of this lively marketplace, filled with the rich aromas and vivid colors of stalls selling exotic spices, herbs, sweets, and confections (be sure to sample some Turkish Delight).

Just behind the market, stop at **Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi**, Istanbul's legendary coffee roaster that has been serving freshly ground Turkish coffee for generations and still draws a steady stream of loyal customers each day.

Next, stop for lunch (not included).

Recommended Venues: Hamdi restaurant or the iconic Pandeli restaurant on the second floor of the Spice Bazaar.



Nearby stands the **Yeni (New) Mosque**, an impressive structure dating back to 1660 – another historical landmark of Istanbul. The lively square in front is a gathering spot where locals feed pigeons – a charming moment you can join with a small bag of birdseed from nearby vendors.

Next, cross the famous **Galata Bridge**, spanning the **Golden Horn**. From here, enjoy sweeping views of historic Istanbul for a truly picturesque moment. The bridge is buzzing with life, and you'll always see locals casting fishing lines into the water below.



This is also the perfect spot to sample **balık ekmek** (fish sandwich) – a beloved Istanbul street food made with chargrilled or pan-fried fish - typically whiting or mackerel - piled into a crusty baguette with fresh onions, parsley, lettuce, herbs, spices, salt, and a generous squeeze of lemon. Try it at one of the casual restaurants on the lower deck of the bridge, or from the food stalls or boats moored along the banks along the waterfront from an authentic and delicious Istanbul experience.



cuisine in variety and depth.

Afterwards, consider ending on a sweet note at **Karaköy Güllüoğlu**, Istanbul's most famous **baklava** shop, regarded by many as the best in the world! Baklava has its roots in the ancient city of Gaziantep, located in southeastern Turkey, an area with rich and diverse culinary heritage whose foods rival, and may even surpass, the scope of French

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At Güllüoğlu, you'll be amazed by the incredible selection of baklava, from the classic pistachio-filled variety to innovative modern takes. It's a must-visit for anyone with a sweet tooth and a love of authentic Turkish flavors.



Your day concludes with a **private Bosphorus Cruise**, sailing between Asia and Europe – arguably the best vantage point to take in the famous Istanbul skyline, with its domes and minarets.

See Ottoman palaces such as **Dolmabahçe**, wooden mansions, and sleek villas - among the most expensive real estate in the world.



Sail beneath the **Bosphorus Bridge** - one of the world's longest suspension bridges – past the lively village of **Ortaköy**, a center of night life, and on to the medieval fortress of **Rumelihisar**, built by Mehmet the Conqueror in just three months before capturing Constantinople from the Byzantines in 1453 and turning it into Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

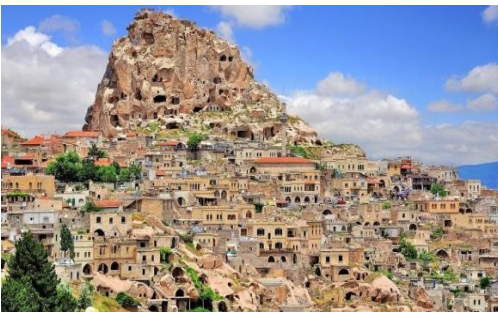


Your guide will take you back to your hotel.
(Meals included: Breakfast)

DAY 4: ISTANBUL / CAPPADOCIA

This morning, transfer to Istanbul Airport for your flight to Kayseri, gateway to ancient **Cappadocia**

Seamless coordination is provided, providing you with the option to safely store your luggage in Istanbul and reclaim it upon your return prior to your cruise departure in Istanbul.



Cappadocia - the “Land of Beautiful Horses” – is famous for surreal rock formations (called “**Fairy Chimneys**”), cave dwellings, and underground cities created over millennia which comprise a landscape unlike anywhere else, described by many as a “lunar landscape”.

Upon arrival, you will be met at the airport and transferred to your cave hotel - *Argos or another hotel of your choice.*

In the afternoon go on a memorable walk in the **Red Valley** among rose and pink colored rocks that create a natural wonder. See chapels and pigeon houses carved into the rocks from centuries ago.



Continue through **Kızılçukur** and on towards **Rose Valley** – known for different colors and types of rock formations, stopping at the ridge for a majestic viewpoint of both valleys. Next, walk to the little village of **Çavuşin**, where people still live in rock-cut dwellings and stone houses.



You may see famous caves such as **St. John the Baptist Church**, and “**baby Fairy Chimneys**” as you walk amongst the dwellings carved on the red mountain cliff and explore additional monk houses carved inside the Fairy Chimneys.



This walk will take about 3 hours and is one of the most interesting valleys of Cappadocia.

You will return to your hotel in the afternoon.
(Meals Included: Breakfast)

***Note:** Depending on your preferences, we can also take you to some additional villages to experience local life as well as to see other important ancient monuments.*

Optional Evening Activity:

A special **wine tasting** in the thousand-year-old cellars of the **Argos Hotel**, originally used for a monastery.



Sample regional grapes such as Kalecik Karası, Shiraz, and Misket - grown in the vineyards of the hotel - while learning about Anatolian winemaking and Turkish wines in a magical setting.



Afterwards, consider continuing your gastronomic journey at the hotel's lovely *Seki Restaurant*, where all dishes are prepared with fresh local ingredients, or at another wonderful restaurant. (Dinner is not included.)

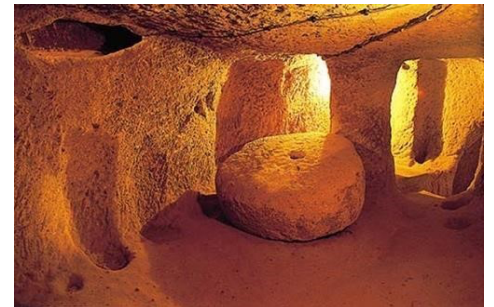
DAY 5: CAPPADOCIA



Rise very early for one of the highlights of Cappadocia: a **hot air balloon ride** over this very unique landscape. You'll be advised the night before the exact pick up time from your hotel (typically around 5:00am depending on the season) and transferred to a field to board your balloon for the approximately 1-hour long flight. Celebrate afterwards with sparkling wine or juice, then return to your hotel for breakfast.

Your guide will pick you up again at 9:30 a.m. to lead you on a guided tour around Cappadocia.

Start by exploring the **underground city of Kaymaklı** – one of the estimated 30 underground dwelling complexes, first started by the Hittites around 2,000 B.C., built and interconnected over the millennia. With over 8 levels of tunnels, Kaymaklı includes living areas, dining quarters, kitchens, storage areas, churches, and more. The spaces are well lit, and there is good ventilation; but you will need to bend down in certain places where the ceiling is very low.



Visit the **Göreme Valley Open-Air Museum** with its many rock churches that are decorated with frescoes.

See **Esentepe** lookout and **Uçhisar Castle** for panoramic views of Göreme Valley from the highest points in Cappadocia.



Then, drive by **Love Valley**, known for its whimsical fairy chimneys and romantic legends. According to one myth, it is said that the stones in this area were rained down by God to avenge the death of two young lovers who fell victim to feuding villagers. A more modern explanation suggests the name came from the heart-shaped fairy chimneys that dot the area's landscape.

You will visit **Devrent (Imagination) Valley**, known for its fantastical rock formations called "**Fairy Chimneys**", which formed almost 30 million. It is also called **Imagination Valley**, as you can imagine what each shape would look like!



Next, visit **Paşabağları (Monks' Valley)**, home to the striking twin-and triple-capped fairy chimneys that are among the most famous in Cappadocia, that some say resemble "smurf" or "hobbit" like homes.

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One of these three-headed fairy chimneys is the **chapel of St. Simeon**. St. Simeon, who lived in the 5th Century lived inside a 15-meter-high column.

Then, stop at the **Zelve Open Air Museum**, which is among the oldest and most important settlements of Cappadocia and one of the three UNESCO sites



in the park. Zelve was a key religious center for Christianity in the area, especially in the 9th and 13th centuries.

Finally visit the village of **Avanos**, famed for its 4,000-year pottery tradition, dating back to Hittite times, with traditional designs using red clay from Kızılırmak River, which is the longest river in Turkey. Try your hand at the potter's wheel.



If you like, you can try your hand on an old-fashioned potter's wheel and create your own clay masterpiece using ancient Hittite techniques.

After the tour, your guide will take you back to your hotel.
(Meals Included: Breakfast)



Optional Evening Activity:



Experience a performance of the **Whirling Dervishes** at the historic **Sarihan Caravanserai**, a roadside inn built by Seljuk Turks in 1249 for merchants - one of many such constructions throughout Anatolia along the Silk Road.

The hour-long Sema ceremony is deeply rooted in the traditions of Mevlana (also known as "Rumi"). The evocative setting and trance-like dancing create an unforgettable evening.

DAY 6: CAPPADOCIA / ISTANBUL

In the morning, transfer to Kayseri Airport for your flight to Istanbul. After luggage collection, proceed to Exit #8 where your local host will be waiting with a sign bearing your name to transfer you to the Galata Cruise Port to board your cruise ship.

(Meals Included: Breakfast)

END OF SERVICES

Note: The order of visits may be adjusted based on local conditions such as traffic or crowds. Your guide will assist with any requested changes whenever possible.

This tour includes some of the many highlights of Istanbul and Cappadocia – but there is a lot more to see! We can create a bespoke itinerary, as you like, based on your interests.

PACKAGE DETAILS

PACKAGE INCLUDES

- Private transfers per itinerary with English-speaking hosts
- All tours with English-speaking licensed professional guides
- Air-conditioned chauffeur-driven vehicles
- All entrance fees
- All transportation, including ferry boats, tolls and parking
- Hot air balloon ride in Cappadocia
- Three-night accommodation in Istanbul
- Two-night accommodation in Cappadocia
- Private cruise on the Bosphorus
- All taxes

PACKAGE EXCLUDES

- Turkish visa
- International flights
- Domestic flights (You will need Istanbul-Cappadocia and Cappadocia-Istanbul flights)
- Lunches and Dinners
- All Optional Experiences, including Wine tasting in Cappadocia, Whirling Dervishes performance in Cappadocia, Walk on the rooftop of the Covered Bazaar (separate charge)
- Alcoholic beverages, unless otherwise specified.
- Any item not specifically included in the Itinerary
- Items of a personal nature
- Gratuities to guides and drivers
- Travel and Trip Cancellation Insurance

PAYMENTS AND PENALTIES

- Deposit (per person): Due upon confirmation of services plus any internal flights
- Final payment: Due 30 days prior to the start of the tour
- Cancellation Penalty (per person) plus costs of internal flights: if cancelled within 30 days of the start of the tour
- No Refunds after final payment
- Travel insurance is recommended.