



Treasures of Travel

The Eastern Turkey and Black Sea Tour, 2023 *~ 22 Days/20 Nights ~*

Experience traveling through the land of legends such as Noah's Ark, Garden of Eden, splendid sceneries of ancient Mesopotamia and Fertile Crescent, and the part of the world with the footprints of millenniums-old civilizations including the world's oldest temple of Gobekli Tepe.

All this combined with the lush tea-growing region of the Black Sea coast, beautiful landscapes and dramatic views with charming village life, impressive castles, and ancient monasteries – not to mention some mouth-watering food specialties!

Day 1

Depart the USA. Overnight flight to Turkey.

Day 2 ~ Antakya

Today you will arrive in Antakya. After your arrival and airport formalities, we will meet and **transfer** you to your hotel in Antakya (ancient Antioch). **Overnight in Antakya.**

Day 3 ~ Antakya

This morning we will visit Antakya **Archaeological Museum**, famous for its mythological themes beautifully displayed in natural light, and its Roman fishing and hunting mosaics. Next we will head to the **Grotto of St. Peter**. In the afternoon we will tour **Samandagi** (ancient **Seleuceia Pieria**), the port city which was once the capital of Antioch. This city was built according to Roman architectural design, with its underground water channel which saved the city from flooding. **Overnight in Antakya.**

Day 4 ~ Adiyaman

Before heading to Adiyaman we will spend the morning exploring the **copper and spice market** in Gaziantep, the most interesting market in Turkey. Gaziantep (ancient Aintap), is the pistachio capital of Turkey, and the city where the traditional Turkish foods, like baklava and kebab originated. We will also visit the **Zeugma Museum**, where the beautiful mosaics rescued from Zeugma are on display. **Overnight in Adiyaman.**

Day 5 ~ Sanli Urfa

Today we will visit the **UNESCO World Heritage site, Commagene Nemrut**, a peak in the Anti-Taurus range rising to the height of 7,000 feet. This archaeological site, famous for its magnificent gigantic heads, was constructed by the pre-Roman King Antiochus I, who thought of himself to be related to the gods. We will also visit **Arsameia**, the ancient capital of Commagene; the **Roman bridge** at Cendere; and Karakus with its tumulus (ancient graveyard) and its impressive funeral columns. On the way to **Urfa** we will stop at the **Ataturk Dam** on the Euphrates River, one of the world's largest irrigation projects, in ancient Mesopotamia. **Overnight in Sanliurfa.**

Day 6 ~ Sanli Urfa

While in Urfa, we will visit **Harran**, where Terah and Abraham are believed to have lived; which is also home to the typical round beehive dwellings made of mud. We'll drive to the **UNESCO World Heritage site, Gobekli Tepe (Belly like hill)**, the exciting new discovery, the world's oldest worship temple. We will visit the **Cave of Abraham**, his birthplace, located next to the **Sacred Pool**, which according to Muslim tradition saved his life. There will be time for browsing through the bazaar and the local shops. **Overnight in Sanliurfa.**

Day 7 ~ Mardin

On the way to Mardin we will stop in **Diyarbakir** (ancient Amidiya), which is located on the Tigris River. This traditional city is at least 5,000 years old, with a colorful mixture of people and interesting Armenian, Syrian Orthodox, Kurdish, Arabic and Turkish architecture. The **ancient wall** surrounding the city was built by Constantine II in the fourth century. Still mostly intact today, it is comparable in many aspects to the Great Wall of China. We will visit **Armenian Church** and **Armenian Museum House** to learn about their culture and architecture that has been around for millenniums here, we also see **Caldian Church** to learn about their culture as well as **Ulu Cami**, one of the oldest mosques in Anatolia, whose history dates back beyond Christianity and Islam. **Overnight in Mardin.**

Day 8 ~ Mardin

We will spend the full day exploring **Mardin, the World Heritage Site**, unique for its diverse architecture. Our sightseeing will include a visit to the Syrian Orthodox Monastery of **Deir-al-Zafaran**, where Christian worship has been practiced for over 1,200 years, as well as to the old city which has an interesting mixture of architecture as a result of having been occupied by different civilizations and **Kayseriye market** with its local produces and friendly shopkeepers. **Overnight in Mardin.**

Day 9 ~ Van via Hasankeyf

Our final destination today is Van. Along the way we'll visit **Hasankeyf**, located in the Tigris River valley. From the bridge you will have a dramatic view over its ancient ruins, the river and the ancient Roman bridge which was once used by Silk Road travelers. We continue our drive through the oil rich city of **Batman**, following the Bitlis River, a tributary of the Tigris, through a gorge so deep you will see only blue sky. Once we arrive in **Bitlis**, a charming provincial town with Armenian-Kurdish origins, we ascend from the gorge to the Anatolian plateau which welcomes us to **Lake Van**. In the evening we'll arrive in **Van**, an important city in Eastern Turkey that is known for its variety of agricultural products and horses. Van dates back to the time of the Great Flood and is purported to be the site of the Garden of Eden. It is also famous for its cats with two different colored eyes (one green and the other one blue). **Overnight in Van.**

Day 10 ~ Van

In the morning we'll take a **boat** across Lake Van, the largest lake in Turkey, to visit **Akdamar Island**, home to one of the most beautiful 10th century **Armenian Church of the Holy Cross**, which is the best example of classic Armenian architecture, where wonderful relief carvings of Bible stories, birds, and animals decorate the walls. Next we'll head to **Cavustepe** (ancient Tushba) to see the remains of the first ancient capital of the Urartian Kingdom. There are some good examples of cuneiform inscriptions on the temple ruins here, and a well-preserved cistern dating from 700 BC. You will be impressed by **Hosap Castle** which was located on the old silk road; a very photogenic landmark dating back to the Urartian time. In the second half of the day we'll tour the **Van Castle**, which has many tombs, and fortifications through which you may wander, and the interesting **Archaeological Museum** offering rich displays of Urartian artifacts. **Overnight in Van.**

Day 11 ~ Kars

We will start the day with a stop at the refreshing **waterfall at Muradiye**. Then we head to **Dogubeyazit** for a breathtaking view of **Mt. Ararat**, the highest mountain in Turkey at 18,000 feet. Covered with snow and ice, it is thought to be the final resting place of Noah's Ark. We will visit the impressive **Palace of Ishak Pasa**, which is a good example of a great mixture of Ottoman, Seljuk, Persian, Georgian, and Armenian architectural styles. **Kars**, once Armenian capital is a typical Eastern Turkey town with a magnificent fortress. The high plateau here creates excellent conditions for the production of yogurt, milk, cheese, honey, and meat. The area is also noted for carpets and kilims known for their special color combinations and unique designs. **Overnight in Kars.**

Day 12 ~ Erzurum

We will start our day with a visit to **Ani**, the ancient capital of Armenia in the XI and XII centuries, which had 100,000 inhabitants in its glorious times and was a rival to Constantinople. Many of the ruins of its close to 1,000 churches and mosques can be still seen. Beyond the city walls there is a deep gorge separating Turkey from Armenia. We will visit some of the ancient ruins including Armenian churches, cathedrals, and Seljuk mosques before heading to Erzurum.

Erzurum is the largest city on the high plateau of Eastern Turkey. While in Erzurum we will see **Rustem Pasha Caravansary**; the old city quarter with its interesting shops; and the famous **Selcuk Cifte-Minare**, built as a theological school. In Erzurum, there are excellent remains from many civilizations that have survived, including Byzantine, Mongol, Selcuk, and Ottoman. **Overnight in Erzurum.**

Day 13 ~ Artvin

In the morning we'll leave high Anatolian plateau in Eastern Turkey and travel through the Georgian Valley along the Coruh River, famous for white water rafting. On the way, we will visit one of the most interesting Georgian churches called **Haho** in Bagbasi village. **Overnight in Artvin.**

Day 14 ~ Trabzon

Today we will drive along the Georgian Border to the Black Sea crossing the Kackar Mountains (Pontic Mountains). Here the Parmak and Kackar Mountains are the sources for so-called "crazy honey", made from the flower *Azaleas Pontica* that created so many problems for the soldiers of Xenophon. As we drive along the Black Sea coast we will visit some of the lively **local markets** and the tea institute to learn how tea is processed. The so-called Laz people of this area are famous for their colorful garments, jokes and friendly personalities; you may notice many hawks here, which are traditionally kept as pets. **Overnight in Trabzon.**

Day 15 ~ Trabzon

Trabzon, the ancient Trapezos is the largest city along the Black Sea coast and famous harbor city on the ancient Silk Road following the 6,500 feet high Zigana Pass which was used by many merchants and some famous travelers such as Marco Polo, for example. When Xenophon and the Ten Thousand mercenaries were fighting their way out of Persia, the first Greek city they reached was 'Trebizond', this is the spot where he reportedly saw the sea and uttered the infamous words "The Sea, the sea"! Today we will visit Greek Orthodox **Sumela Monastery** founded in 500 AD. This monastery is carved on the face of a cliff over 1,000 feet high, where monks could get isolated from the worldly and dangerous society below. The view from this ancient retreat is impressive. We will dedicate the rest of the day to the exploration of the old city noted for the remains from Roman, later Byzantine Empire under Alexander Comneni and rich heritage of Ottoman architectural style buildings, including the house where the 16th century greatest ruler of the Ottoman Empire Suleiman the Magnificent was born; as well as visit **Trabzon Archeological & Ethnographic museum**. There will be time to browse through the lively local markets. **Overnight in Trabzon.**

Day 16 ~ Amasya

Our agenda today includes **Giresun**, the hazelnut capital of Turkey, which is located on a peninsula. Legend claims that Jason and the Argonauts stopped here on their way to Georgia in search of the Golden Fleece. In a short distance from shore, you can see Giresun Island, the largest on the Turkish Black Sea coast, which houses the ruins of a roofless stone temple, fortifications, and two wine or oil presses. The roofless temple was in ancient times attributed to the Amazons, and dedicated to Ares. Next we pass **Ordu** on our way, another famous city along the Black sea coast for hazelnuts, before we turn inland and reach the lovely town of Amasya. **Overnight in Amasya.**

Day 17 ~ Amasya

Located on the Yesilirmak (Iris) River, **Amasya** is one of the most beautiful towns in central Anatolia. Strabo, the Geographer, was born here in 64 BC. According to him, the Greek name of the city comes from Amasis, the queen of the Amazons, who were said to have lived here. In Ottoman times the princes were sent here for the education and training they acquired for future rule. We'll take a walking tour of the old town with its restored Ottoman homes and the King Rock Tombs of Pontus Greeks carved into the hillside. The **Archaeological Museum** houses a collection of ceramics, glass, bronze, jewelry and more; besides its fine ethnographic section. We will also visit the XIX century **Hazeranlar Museum House** to learn about the typical Ottoman architecture. **Overnight in Amasya.**

Day 18 ~ Sinop

We'll venture back to the Black Sea and continue our journey to **Sinop**. The road between Amasya and Sinop passes through one of the most beautiful stretches of rolling hills and farming fields with all kinds of grains, especially rice fields. On the way we pass through **Boyabat**, an important city in antiquity with remains of impressive fortress and beautiful Ottoman houses. Located on a promontory extending towards the Black Sea, Sinop has a natural location for a port. It also offers a great view of the Black Sea. **Overnight in Sinop.**

Day 19 ~ Sinop

The history of **Sinop**, goes back to 4,500 BC, long used as a Hittite port which appears in Hittite sources as "SINUWA". It was a very important harbor city during the Miletus occupation around the 7th century BC; and once the capital of the Pontic Empire, after Amasya. It is probably one of the most charming and friendly Black Sea coast cities. We will see mosques, churches, the **Temple of Serapis**, and the city fortification with the 13th century **Byzantine Citadel**. The **Museum in Sinop** has interesting artifacts from Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods. We will also tour an attractive Ottoman house turned into **Ethnographic museum** which among other things has interesting costumes from the region. **Overnight in Sinop.**

Day 20 ~ Kastamonu

Today we'll drive west along the picturesque Black Sea coast, passing secluded villages and towns to **Abana**. From Abana we head for inland over the beautiful mountains to Kastamonu, a typical small Anatolian town with long, ancient history and fine Ottoman buildings. Kastamonu is easy walking, friendly city, which offers wonderful mixture of old and new architecture to enjoy, as well as known for its friendly locals. While in Kastamonu we will visit the **Archeological museum** where Ataturk declared his headgear reform and nearby **Ethnographic museum** opened in a restored beautiful Ottoman house. **Overnight in Kastamonu.**

Day 21 ~ Istanbul

On the way to Istanbul we will stop and stroll through the **UNSECO World Heritage site Safranbolu**. The name of this city is derived from its former industry of producing saffron from the stigmas of autumnal crocus. The city is an open-air museum of well-preserved Ottoman houses. We'll spend time exploring its narrow, twisting cobblestone lanes and seeing traditional trades and crafts practiced just as they were in Ottoman times. In the evening we'll reach Istanbul, and its old city quarter where your hotel is located. **Overnight in Istanbul.**

Day 22

Depart for the USA.

Departure Dates: 22 days/20 nights

May 22 ~ June 12

Sept. 4 ~ 25

Tour Price:

\$4,300.00 per person in double room and 10 ~ 12 guests traveling together

\$800.00 single supplement

Price Includes:

- Accommodation for 20 nights at selected 3, 4 and 5 star hotels and/or restored Ottoman mansions, special boutique hotels.
- Breakfast daily
- 10 dinners
- Daily private sightseeing by comfortable air-conditioned minibuses or vans including professional driver
- English speaking and knowledgeable guide
- Entrance fees to sites indicated in bold on the itinerary
- All arrival and departure transfers
- Baggage handling
- Boat trip to Akdamar Island
- Complete information package with itineraries, travel and visa information, and luggage tags