



EasternTurkeyTours

12 day tour of Eastern Turkey



Exceed your expectations Email: info@easternturkeytour.org



Hagia Sofia

Day 1 Trabzon

Take the morning flight from Istanbul to Trabzon .The guide will be at the airport to collect the party.We will start the tour with a visit the Hagia Sophia Museum, a significant 14th century Byzantine church, overlooking the Black Sea, which boasts some frescos of considerable importance .

From Trabzon we travel a short way up the Zigana Valley, to Macka in the Altindere National Park to visit the Monastery of the Black Virgin at Sumela. In this truly spectacular setting, the seven story Sumela Monastery hangs from the side of a 1200 ft cliff overlooking a steep river valley.

This has been a monastic site as early as the 4th century AD and was a renowned monastic community partly because of its remarkable location and the ascetic principles characterised by the early years of Christian monasticism. The monastic community here played an important part in the many political and religious debates and conflicts during the Byzantine period and during the Kingdom of Trebizond. The Turks took control of the region in 1461 and Sumela's political influence ceased but under Ottoman rule its religious community continued until the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. The present buildings probably date from the 12th century and the frescos from between 1710 and 1860.

In the latter part of the First World War Trabzon was occupied by Russian forces and the Christian communities became involved in the ethnic struggles that preceded and accompanied that occupation. In 1923, as a part of the post war settlement between Greece and the new Turkish Republic, the Christian population of



The Wedding at Cana



Sumela Monastery



Sumela interior

Turkey was exchanged for the Muslim population of Greece (with a few exceptions). The buildings then fell into a dilapidated state but in recent years have been restored and on August the 15th 2010 Istanbul's Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew held the first mass since 1923 on the occasion of the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos which commemorates the "falling asleep" or ascension of the Virgin Mary into heaven.
Drive to Hopa via Rize along the coast of Black Sea.



The Virgin and Christ Child, Sumela





Ishan Church, Artvin

Day 2 Artvin, Erzurum

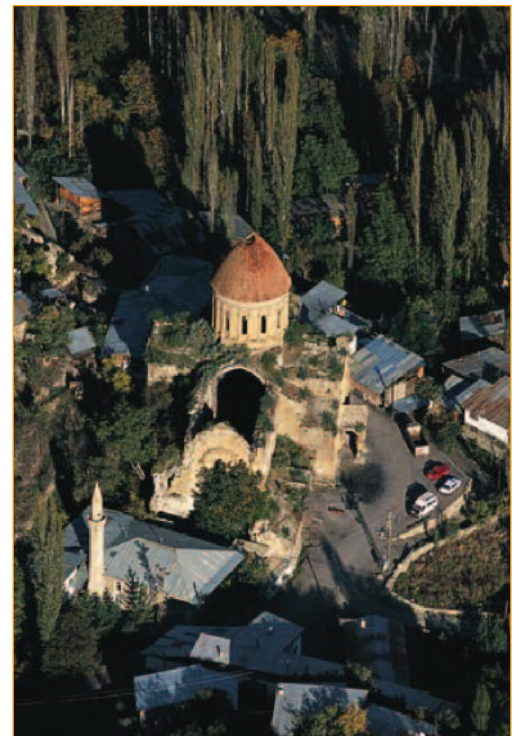
After breakfast, drive to Ishan Church via Artvin.

We will stop to see the Bocka Dam and then drive through the Coruh Valley characterised by beautiful wild landscapes all along the raging river, and Georgian valleys including castles and churches. Visit the mountain village of Ishan. In this village, which was once an Armenian then a Georgian bishopric, stands the ruins of an 8-9th century cathedral and a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary in 1006. After Ishan we visit The Osvank Monastery was constructed between the years 963 and 973 and was dedicated to St. John the Baptist.

The monastery included a church, a refectory and a scriptorium. It was one of the most important bishoprics in the region and an important cultural centre especially famous for its rich manuscripts. The church is by far the largest cruciform-shaped church in the region.

We continue along Lake Tortum, and then through Georgian Valley you will continue to Erzurum, located on a plateau at an altitude of 1905 m/ 6,250 ft.

Dinner and overnight Erzurum.



Osvank Monastery



Ancient Ani

Day 3: Erzurum, Kars-Ruins of Ani

After breakfast see the Great Mosque, Yakutiye and Double minaret, Medreses and other central sites including the bazaar. After sightseeing in Erzurum we depart for Kars along the Aras River via Cobandede cut stone bridge and past the First World War battle site of Sarakimis, the scene of a major military disaster for the Ottomans in late 1914 that resulted in the Russian occupation of Erzurum and Trabzon and, later Van and Bitlis with the disastrous ethnic bloodshed that followed. Arrive in Kars and continue for Ani, the former capital of the great medieval Armenian kingdom. In the mid 10th century, nothing in Europe could rival this capital of the Armenian kingdom in terms of either size or magnificence. The remains of the ruined city include several churches as well as the shell of the Cathedral of Ani, the citadel and a mosque along with an extensive and well preserved defensive wall. There are also some exciting remains of frescoes in the Church of St Gregory (Tigran Honentz) despite exposure to the elements for centuries.

Dinner and Overnight Kars.



The Church of the Redeemer, Ani



Ishak Pasha Saray

Day 4: Dogubeyazit-Van

We continue our journey south skirting around the western edge of Mt Ararat.

In Dogubeayzit, we visit the spectacular Ishak Pasha Palace 1685 - 1784 with unique fusion of architecture from Seljuk, Ottoman, Georgian, and Armenian/Persian styles. Even in its ruined state the opulence and originality of art and impeccable taste coupled with the ambition of its owner instantly grasp the imagination. Out on the remotest reaches of the empire, far from central authority in Istanbul its creators produced provincial palace that could rival any in the empire. Built as the seat of the government in the province of Mount Ararat in Eastern Anatolia and as his residence in about 1784 by the semi independent Kurdish Pasha, Ishak, and his son, the complex is an example of Seljuk revival with many Turkish Baroque elements. Situated on a rocky outcrop overlooking the Ararat plateau, the palace is divided in the traditional Ottoman manner into three sections: the first is service court; the second is the selamlık (or greeting) court; and the third is the haramlık (private) court. The splendid decorative programme is an eighteenth century interpretation of the twelfth-thirteenth centuries' Seljuk styles, and is all executed in exquisite stone carving.

The building was looted by Russian forces on a number of occasions in the 19th century and during the First World War; the huge gilded gold gates that adorned the palace were stolen by Russian forces in 1917 and are now at the entrance of the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. From Dogubeyazit we will travel along the Turkish/



The road to Ararat



The falls at Muradiye

Iranian border to see the Meteor Hole and from here we leave for Van via Muradiye and the pretty Bendimaahi Falls.

Van is the provincial capital of Van and an important market town for the Kurdish people of this part of Turkey. Lake Van is home to unique flora and fauna. Our arrival in Van will be early evening.

Dinner and overnight in Van.



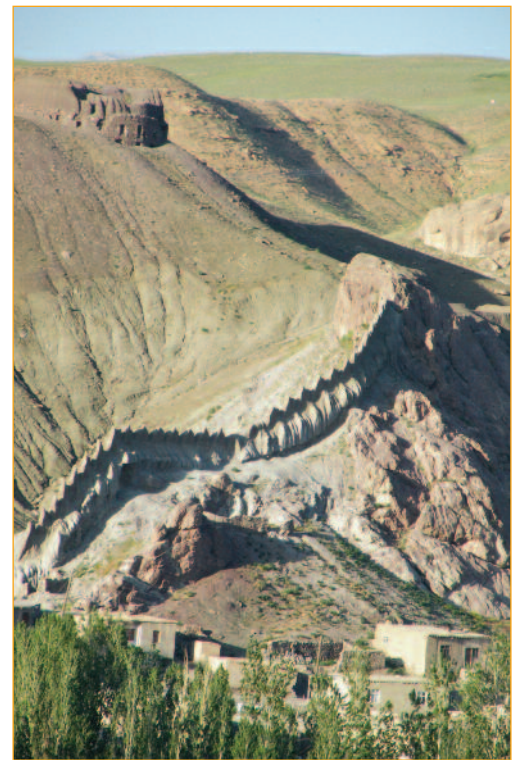


Hosap Castle

Day 5: Van, Urartian sites, Lake Van, Akdamar

After breakfast we will leave for Hosap to see Hosap Castle.

The main castle structure of Hosap was built straddling the Silk Road and served as both a means of protecting the road and as a point of charging tolls on travellers. Constructed in 1643 by a local Kurdish chieftain called Mahmudi Sari Suleyman (or Blond Suleyman) The castle is built on a rocky outcrop on the north bank of the Hosap River. The structure that we see today dates mostly from 1643 when Hosap's governor Sari Suleyman Bey rebuilt the castle and added a new entrance tower. A castle was probably built at this location as early as the Urartu Kingdom (9th c.- 6th c. B.C.); it is certain, however, that the structure was built early on and modified numerous times until the seventeenth century. The Mahmudi castle was damaged in two sieges by the Ottoman Beylerbeyi or Governor General of Van in the 1650s and in 1839. It was restored in the 1970s and 80s by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and again in 2011. After the castle we leave for Lake Van to visit the island of Akdamar where we visit the beautifully restored 10th C Armenian Church of the Holy Cross, or Sourp Khach; built as a part of a palace and religious complex between 915 and 921 by the Armenian King Gagik Ardzruni. Although it is one of the best known examples of Armenian architecture, it is also unique in that there is no comparable example in terms of the reliefs and decorative features that adorn the exterior of the building. The grace and simplicity of the original structure is superb although it has been somewhat marred by later additions. A chapel was added in 1293 at the south eastern side of the church and dedicated to St. Stepanos and a further chapel was added at the north eastern side by the Catholicos Zakarias I (1296- 1336) while the section in front of this



More than 2,500 years old, the mud brick walls of Urartian Hosap. Hosap means "Sweet or Beautiful Water" in both Urartian and Kurdish.

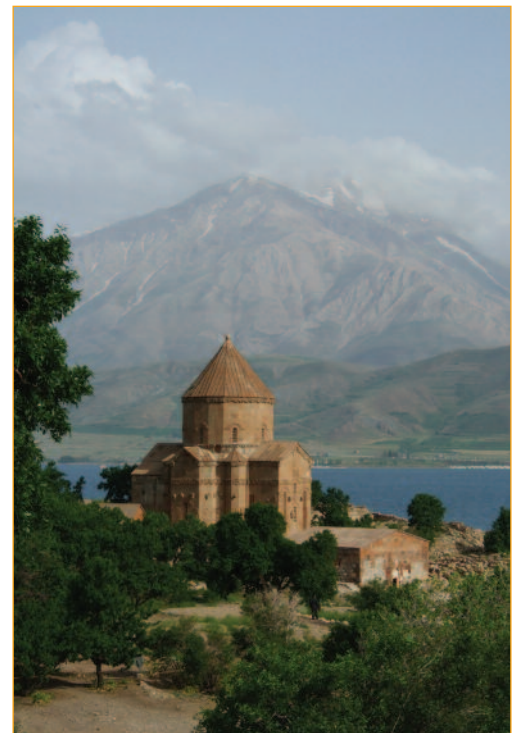


The story of Jonah and the whale in relief carved on the exterior of the Church of the Holy Cross.

chapel serves as an entrance. Catholicos Tovmas (Thomas) built an addition at the front of the church producing a lower "split level" floor plan.

At the end of the 18th century a belfry was added over the southern entrance which partly obstructs view of some reliefs. In spite of these later accretions, the church retains its air of grace and timeless simplicity. The reliefs on the exterior of the church, while naive in style, demonstrate great artistry and skill in both their conception and execution. One of only a few Catholicosates (until 1916) Sourp Khach held the authority to consecrate bishops, elect church leaders and bless the holy oil (miuron) that was essential for religious rites such as baptism, marriage, funerals and the anointing of bishops. The Church of the Holy Cross is a museum but was opened for religious services for the first time since 1916 on September 19th, 2010; services were led by the Armenian Bishop, Aram Atesyan the Grand Sacristan, of the Holy Mother of God Armenian Cathedral at the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople in Kumkapi, Istanbul. This marked a significant milestone in the history of Sourp Khach and will be repeated annually from now on.

We will have lunch of local fish at our own restaurant on the shore of Lake Van, opposite Akdamar Island - This is the only type of fish which survives in salty waters of the Lake Van and is named Inci Kefal (pearl mullet). Lake Van is the largest lake in Turkey and the second largest in the Middle East. The lake is located in the region of eastern Anatolia. It is a saline and soda lake, receiving water from numerous small streams that descend from the surrounding mountains. Lake Van is one of the world's largest endorheic lakes (having no outlet). The original outlet from the basin was blocked by an ancient volcanic eruption during the Pleistocene period when



The Church of the Holy Cross on Akdamar



Holy Mass at Sourp Khach

lava flows from Nemrut volcano blocked westward outflow towards the Mus Plain. Now dormant, Nemrut Dagi is close to the western shore of the lake while another dormant stratovolcano, Süphan Dagi dominates the northern side of the lake. Lake Van covers an area of 3713 km². It is more than 119 km across at its widest point and is 1640 metres above sea level.





Day 6: Tatvan-Nemrut Volcano Mountain

We will leave Van and drive along the southern shore of Lake Van to Tatvan. After stopping for refreshments in Tatvan, we will drive to Mount Nemrut crater and have a picnic lunch by the Crater Lakes. Nemrut Mountain (not to be confused with Nemrut Dagi in Adiyaman) rising above Tatvan on the south western edge of Lake Van. The highest peak of the mountain stands at 3050 meters and is one of the largest complete calderas in the world. The volcanic cone was believed to have originally been higher. It was at 4450 meter before its eruption. The last time it was active was in 1440 BC.

There are five lakes within the crater, and the largest two, which we will visit, are very different. The Cold Lake (13 sq.kms) has an average depth of 100 meters, where its deepest point is at 155 m. The Hot Lake has a visible amount of steam rising from its thermal springs. The heat may reach up to 60 degrees centigrade. We will then visit the tombs of Seljuk Kings in Ahlat and return to Tatvan for dinner.

Overnight Tatvan.



The Seljuk cemetery at Ahlat with Nemrut Crater in the background



Hasankeyf on the Tigris

Day 7: Batman, Hasankeyf & Mardin

Via Bitlis we continue down the Bitlis Gorge, via the city of Batman, to the town Hasankeyf for lunch. In Hasankeyf (soon to be submerged under the lake of a new dam on the Tigris) we will visit some of the many caves and the ruins of the medieval Byzantine city. On our way west to Mardin we will stop in Midyat to see the Silver bazaar. Arrive to Mardin visit Kasimiye Medrese.

Dinner and overnight in Mardin.





Day 8 Mardin

After breakfast visit Deir-Al-Zafaran (Saffron Monastery).

The Saffron Monastery was once the ancient centre of the Syriac Christian Patriarchy. This site has been the centre of religious worship for many centuries, the monastery itself is built over an ancient temple, built in 1000BC and dedicated to the worship of the sun and which now provides the foundations to the main part of the monastery buildings - it is a fascinating structure as the roof of the temple to the sun is, essentially, a flat arch!

From Mardin we will travel northwest to Diyarbakir to see the 10 Arches Bridge on the Tigris River.

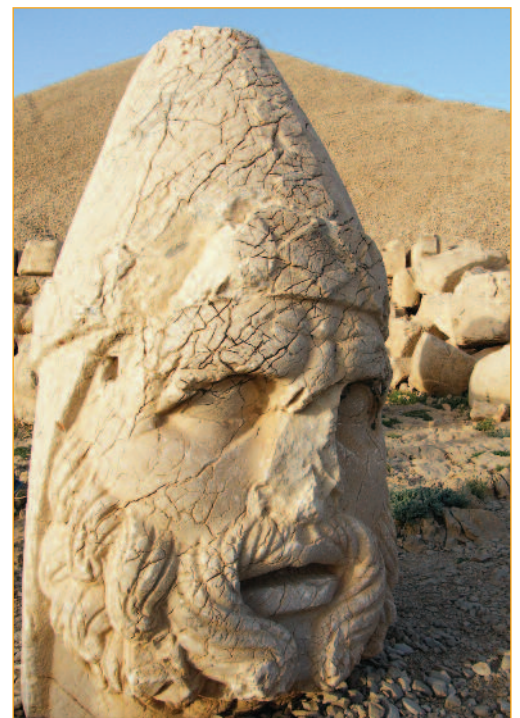
Overnight Diyarbakir

Day 9: Nemrut

Sightseeing in Diyarbakir: the Ulu Cami (Mar Thoma)(Mosque and Church), then visit the Great wall. Leave for Nemrut via the ferry over the Eufratesy arriving in Narlice Village in Nemrut National Park. We will travel to the top of Mount Nemrut. Tombs of Commagene Kingdom and the Colossal Statues of Gods. Climbing up to Tumulus of Antiochos, the capital of Kommagene we will watch the sun set from the summit of Nemrut. This ancient funerary monument at the peak of Mt Nemrut was forgotten and lost to memory for nearly 2000 years. This iconic monument was only rediscovered accidentally by a surveyor working for the Ottoman government in the early 1880s. At the peak of the mountain, 2150 metres, there is a tumulus of crushed stones beneath which, it is believed, lie the remains of the monument's builder Antiochus I



The figures on the east terrace





The Pools of Abraham

Epiphanes. To the east and west, facing the rising and setting sun, are platforms upon which are to be found giant statues representing Gods, Heroes and the King himself. If any monument deserves the description "enigmatic" this is surely the one. We will be at the summit to see the setting of the sun over these silent stones. Overnight near Nemrut.

Day 10 Nemrut - Urfa

After breakfast you will see Karakus Tumulus, a burial sanctuary and the Cendere Bridge, erected by the XVI Legion in the honour of Roman Emperor Septimus Severus, before proceeding to for Urfa. Via Urfa we will visit Ataturk dam a part of the giant South East Anatolia Project. Arriving in Urfa we will visit the Holy Pools of Abraham and the cave where, tradition tells us, the Prophet Abraham was born. Visit the Bazaar.

Dinner and Overnight Urfa.

Day 11: Gobekli Tepe - Gaziantep

After breakfast we will visit the on-going archaeological dig at Gobekli Tepe. Although this site is not widely known it is one of the most important archaeological digs currently being undertaken anywhere - this site represents a major shift in our understanding of man's early history. Here lie the remains of the earliest religious structures built by man yet to be discovered. At about 11000-13000 years old and pre-dating pottery, writing, Stonehenge and the Pyramids!

Depart for Gaziantep and renowned Mosaic museum which houses the mosaics taken from the city of Zeugma which is now submerged



One of the many carved megaliths forming the chambers



One of the many stone circle chambers at Gobekli Tepe



Gaziantep Baklava best served with delicious, rich Turkish coffee!

under the flood waters of the Ataturk dam. The mosaics are a superb example of the skill and artistry of these ancient craftsmen, not to mention the wealth and taste of the citizens who commissioned them. From the museum we will leisure time visit the citadel district at the centre of the city and then to the old town to enjoy the sights and smells of old Gaziantep, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. In spite of all the history and in a country renowned for the excellence of its cuisine, what makes Gaziantep special is its food. Alongside now familiar Turkish specialities, there is Gaziantep food, and the people in this part of Turkey like their food hot and spicy! Food in Gaziantep is different from the cuisine in other parts of Turkey because of the influence of Ogus Turks and Aleppo in neighbouring Syria. The difference is visible in its rice meals, soups, kebabs, meatballs, etc. Its kebab varieties include kiyma kebab or minced meat, kusbasi kebab, simit kebab, patlican (aubergine) kebab, ciger (liver) kebab and sogan (onion) kebab. and so on, some of them fearsomely hot. Apart from all this, there is lahmacun (a pancake prepared with spicy meat and karisik dolama (a preparation made of different types of vegetables), yogurtlu patates or potato with yogurt and much, much more.

Its desserts are a must try for the tourist as well and they include the sweet pastries baklava, kadayif and many others. Baklava, for which Gaziantep is famous, is made from numerous layers of filo pastry smothered in



Alexander the Great?

melted butter and sugar forming delicious syrup, and masses of crushed pistachios all producing a mouthwatering combination of tastes. Gaziantep is Turkey's capital of pistachio production something that you will have noticed this as you drove to Gaziantep because you will have passed mile upon mile of pistachio trees.

Day 12: Depart from Gaziantep for Istanbul



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