



EasternTurkeyTours

Grand Tour of Eastern Turkey



Exceed your expectations Email: info@easternturkeytour.org

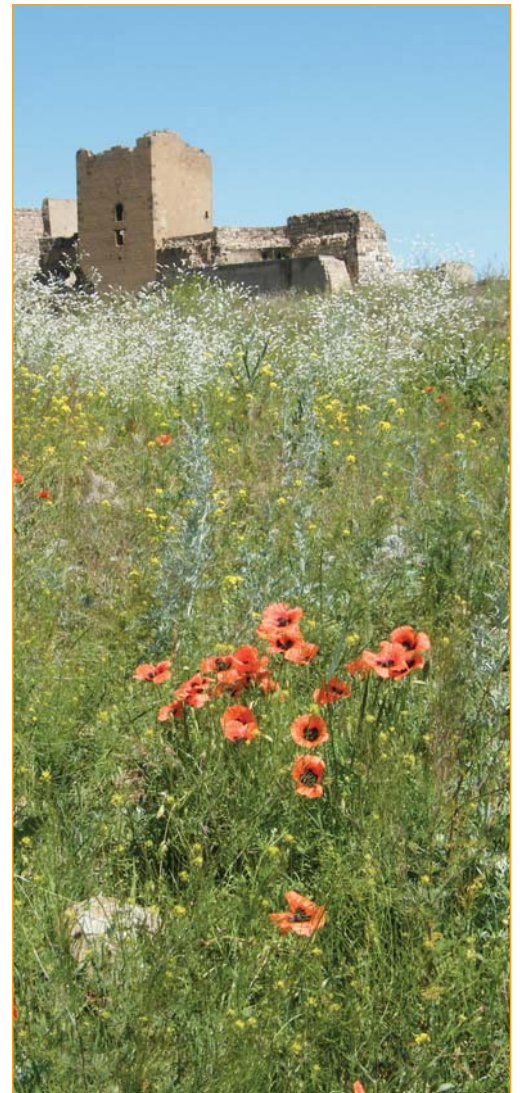


Spring time at the ancient Armenian city of Ani

The Adventure begins

Welcome to the Grand Tour of Eastern Turkey; a ten day tour of the natural and historic splendours of a region that has been the confluence of cultures for millennia. The tour will take you from Trabzon on the Black Sea coast and on through the Alpine passes of the Pontic mountains to Erzerum and then along the Arras plain and up the Arras gorge to the eastern outpost of Kars via the WW I battle-field of Sarakimis. Kars will be the base for a visit to the medieval Armenian city of Ani and then on, around Mt Ararat, to Dogubeyazit and the serene palace of Ishak Pasha overlooking the plains of Ararat.

Following Dogubeyazit the tour will go on to Van where there will be a day to either relax or to join smaller groups to see the sights around and near the city. Following Van the tour will visit the Nemrut Crater Lakes and the Seljuk cemetery at Ahlat before travelling on to Batman down the dramatic Bitlis gorge and then on to Hasankeyf on the river Tigris. The tour then takes in Midyat, Mardin and Sanliurfa with a visit to the Pool of Abraham and a short trip to see the extraordinary archaeological dig at Gobekli Tepe. From Urfa, on to the mysterious and enigmatic Tumulus on top of Mt Nemrut in Adiyaman with its amazing funerary monuments and the next day on to Gaziantep and the fabulous mosaic museum and sinful baklava. The tour then concludes with an optional three days enjoying the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of Istanbul.





The Monastery of the Virgin Mary at Sumela

Day 1

Arrive at Trabzon and after a visit to the Aya Sofia museum, journey to the Altin Dere national park to visit the breathtaking cliff side monastery of the Virgin Mary at Sumela.

From Sumela we cross the Zigana pass and through the Alpine scenery and forests of the Pontic mountains and on to the great eastern city of Erzerum.



Day 2

See the sights of Erzerum, including the Great Mosque and the Medrese before heading up the Arras River plain and into the Arras river gorge, through the WWI battlefield of Sarikamis and into the frontier town of Kars. Between the 1870s and 1917 Kars and Sarikamis were Russian frontier posts and still contain many Russian military buildings, now housing the Turkish army; these two towns hold the distinction of being, in winter, the coldest places in Turkey. In the spring and summer, however, the region is a cornucopia of wild flowers and natural abundance- some of the best honey in the world comes from the many travelling bee keepers you will see along the route.



Itinerant Bee Keepers of Eastern Turkey



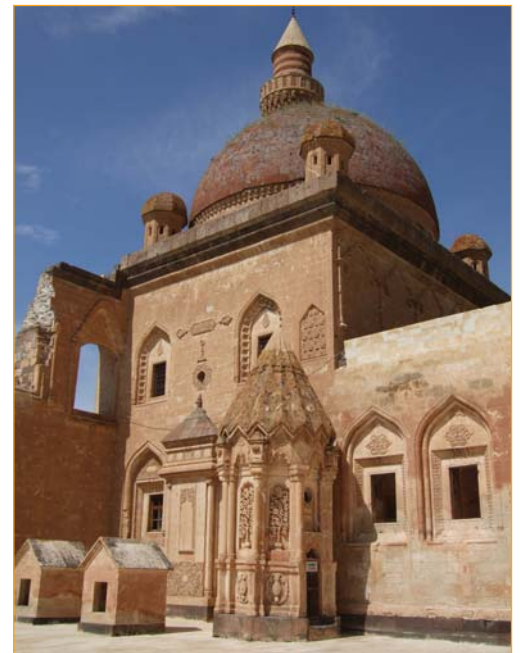
Church of the Redeemer with the city walls in the distance

Day 3

Early morning trip to visit the ancient Armenian city of Ani. Located on a crook in the gorge of the River Arpacay right on the border of Armenia, Ani is an extraordinary site built by King Ashot III as his new capital in 961. After a short period of prosperity and in spite of its position along important trade routes the city slid into decline through internecine feuding and the encroachment of neighbouring powers culminating in the Mongol invasion of Tamerlane in 1239. A devastating earthquake in 1319 finished the process off, trade routes shifted and the city fell into ruin. Once home to over 100,000 people the site is now an enigmatic and wind swept monument to a vanished civilisation.

From Ani we continue across the Igdir plain, with light refreshments on the bus, and then in to the foothills of Ararat and on to Dogubeyazit to see Ishak Pasha Saray.

With its wonderful stone carvings, cool interiors and spectacular views Ishak Pasha Saray is one of the iconic sites of Eastern Turkey. We will pause here for a delicious early supper at the Yoresel Yemek Evi; run by a local women's cooperative for girls and women who have suffered poverty and disadvantages in life, the restaurant is a little island of friendly and spotlessly cool calmness in the hustle and bustle of this frontier town. Serving delicious, wholesome, food we feel that as a part of our policy of responsible tourism we could not give Yoresel Yemek Evi a miss and we know that once you taste their food you will agree!



Ishak Pasha Saray



The friendly staff at Yoresel Yemek Evi in Dogubeyazit



The Muradiye Falls

Day 3 (continued)

From Dogubeyazit we continue on to Van passed eerie and spectacular volcanic rock-scapes and skirting the Iranian border with a brief leg stretch at the falls of Muradiye along the way. From Muradiye to Van we will pass meadows carpeted with flowers in the spring or filled with golden wheat in late summer.



Medieval Armenian church nestling under the cliff at Muradiye

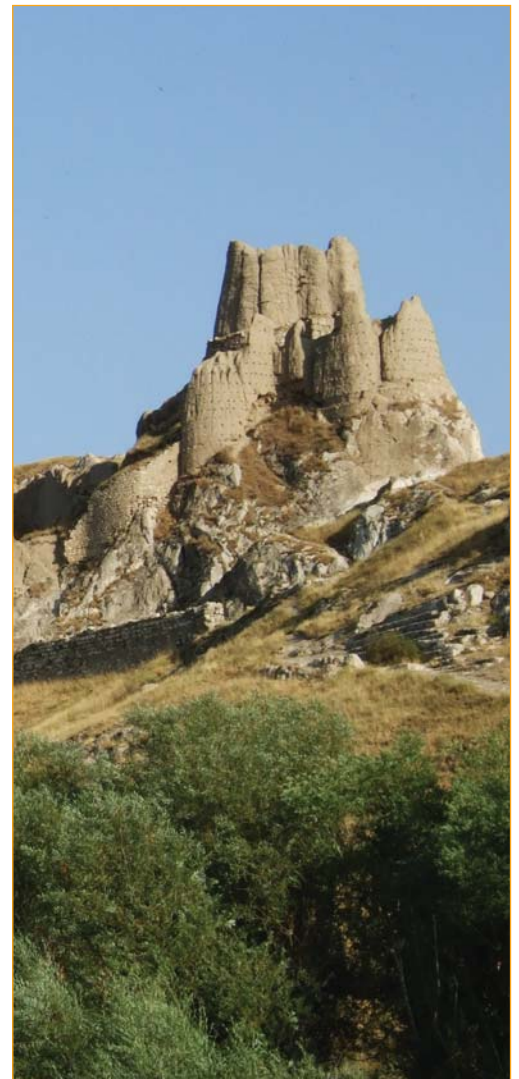


Church of the Holy Cross on Akdamar Island, Lake Van

Day 4

This is a rest day because yesterday was a long one. You have the opportunity to relax and shop in the city of Van or take advantage of smaller, shorter tour groups visiting nearby sites such as Hosap Castle, Cavustepe or Akdamar Island with its beautiful and tranquil 10th century Armenian Church, followed by a lunch of delicious fresh fish from Lake Van in our own restaurant on the shore.

To end a perfect day in Van we will finish with sunset on Van Citadel. The Citadel at Van is an ancient structure, the earliest part of which was Built by the Urartians; over looking their capital, known as Tushpa, this part of the castle dates from about 800BC. . Other cultures have made their contributions and the castle was in use as a military fortification during WWI. The citadel overlooks the lake, the old ruined city of Van, devastated during the fighting of 1915-1918 - and the new city of Van. Above all the sunset on the citadel is spectacular.



Nearly 3000 years old, the mud brick Urartian citadel atop Van castle mount



Day 5

Leisurely late breakfast in your hotel in Van and then onto Tatvan on the southwest shore of Lake Van, either by the scenic southern road or, timings permitting, by the equally scenic Van to Tatvan ferry. Late afternoon we visit the 11th century Seljuk tombs and cemeteries at Ahlat, marking the fact that the newly arrived Seljuks were putting down roots after the defeat by the Seljuk Turkish Sultan Arp Arslan of the Byzantines at the battle of Malazgirt, just 60kms north of here, in 1071. Ahlat's tombstones are unique with the headstones standing like stele settling at angles over the centuries due to subsidence and earthquakes giving them a desolate and mysterious appearance.



Ahlat's Seljuk tombstones with the brooding presence of Mt Nemrut volcano crater in the background



The Cold Lake in Nemrut Crater

Day 6

After overnighting in Tatvan we have an early start for our visit to Nemrut crater. Nemrut mountain crater is one of the largest complete calderas in the world. Rising to 3050 metres around the rim there are a series of lakes within the crater of which we will visit the two largest; one is ice cold, the other is hot- along its northern edge sometimes as much as 60 degrees centigrade. In spite of this thermal activity, which also includes a series of blow holes around the crater that expel hot air, the volcano has not been active since 1440BC. The floor of the crater has its own micro climate and in mid summer and autumn is frequented by nomads who bring their flocks here for grazing after the harsh winter months.

Leaving Mt Nemrut volcano we head towards Bitlis and then down the spectacular Bitlis gorge to the city of Batman, capital of Turkey's small but important oil fields. In the course of this day you will have travelled from the green highlands of the east, reminiscent of the central Asian steppes, via the rocky and precipitous mountain gorge from Bitlis to the plains of Mesopotamia and the valley of the River Tigris. Our overnight stop is in Batman at a Thermal Spa Hotel, which will give us a good early start for the next day.



Nomad's camp overlooking Lake Van, Mt Nemrut crater



Hasankeyf on the river Tigris

Day 7

Early start to visit the cave dwellings of Hasankeyf on the river Tigris while the temperatures are still cool.

Soon to be submerged under the rising waters of a new dam system Hasankeyf is a must see in south eastern Turkey. An ancient town the inhabitants of which until recently still dwelt in caves carved out of the rock in the canyon above the modern town. Once the dam is full it is said that only the tip of the minaret will be visible. After visiting the caves and the ancient citadel on top of the canyon you can come down, lounge on a cardak and dangle your feet in the Tigris while you sip a refreshing cold drink.

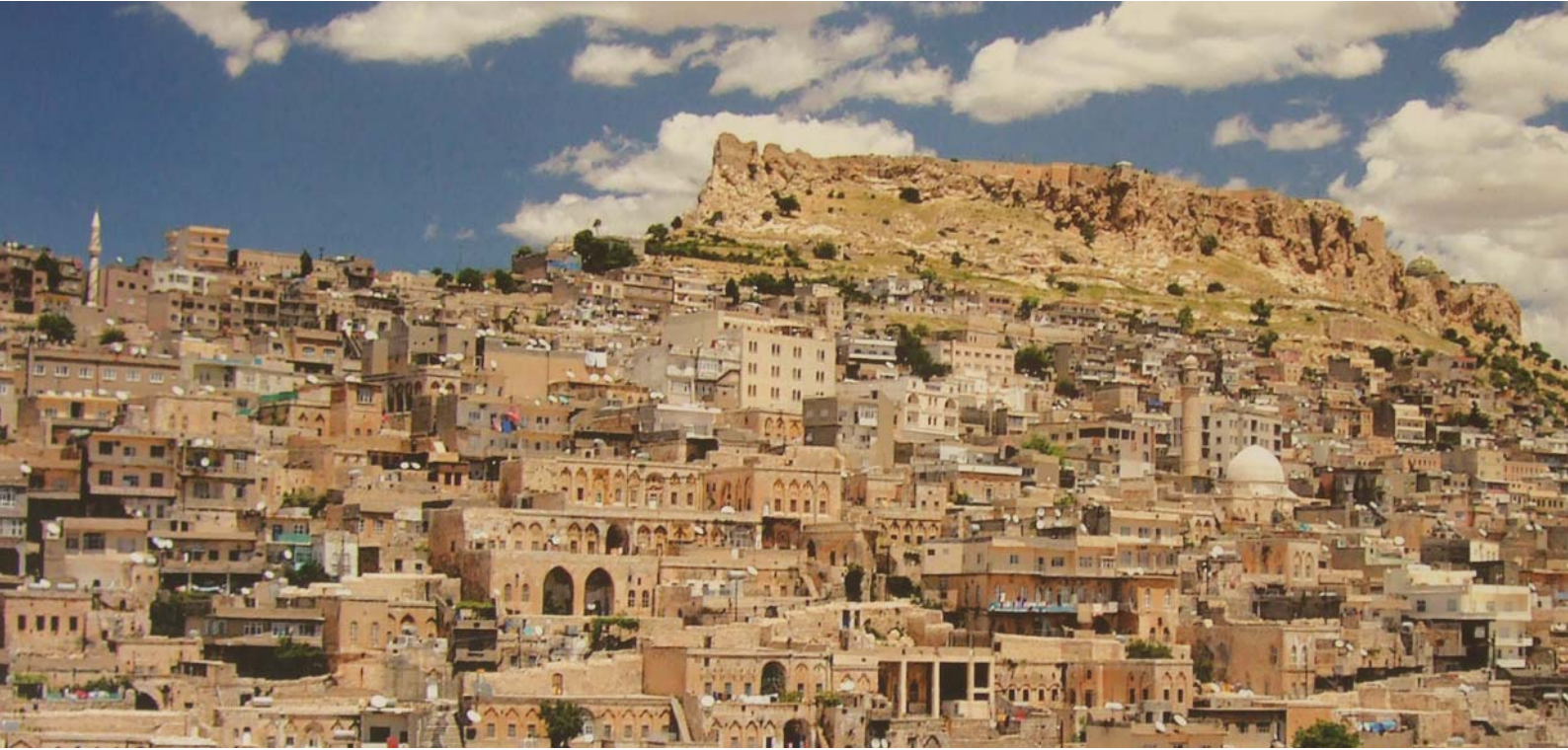
From Hasankeyf we continue through the fertile Gurduc Valley and on to Midyat to visit the bazaar and silver shops: the silver trade here is dominated by Syriac Christians who have been renowned as silversmiths for many generations. From Midyat we continue to Mardin where we will overnight in a fabulous Kervansaray in the heart of the old town where you will be able to enjoy a meal while looking over at the twinkling lights of Syria just a few kilometres away.



A cardak to recline on



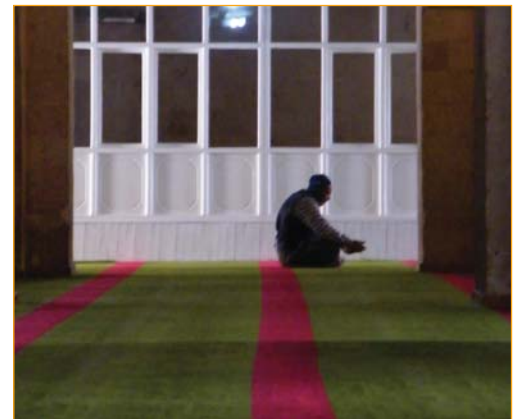
View from the Kervansaray of old Mardin



Mardin

Day 8

Visit the Great Mosque in Mardin for a moment of tranquillity and peace before the heat and dust of the day. From Mardin's mosque we travel the short distance from town to the Saffron Monastery, 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!



Moments of peace





The Pools of Abraham, Urfa

Day 8 (continued)

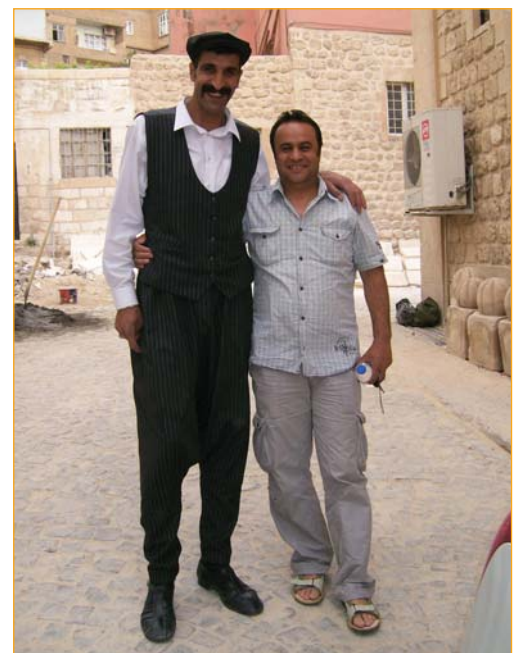
After a rich, delicious cup of Syrian coffee on the terrace overlooking the desert to the south we continue on to Sanliurfa- also known as Urfa.

When we arrive in Urfa we check into the hotel to freshen up then out again to visit the pools of Abraham and the holy fish and to stroll and relax in the beautiful gardens, in the cool of the early evening, with the locals and the pilgrims who come to visit the site where, tradition tells us, the patriarch Abraham was born.

Dinner in Urfa will be in an authentic Turkish Han in a delightful and relaxed atmosphere.



Artuklu Kervanserai



A friendly welcome at the Artuklu Kervanserai



The dig site at Gobekli Tepe

Day 9

After breakfast we travel a short distance from Sanliurfa to visit the extraordinary archaeological dig at Gobekli Tepe. This is a relatively small site and is yet to capture the imagination of the wider public as the large and more accessible sites in the Mediterranean and Near East have done. Yet it is probably no exaggeration to say that in simple archaeological and historical terms this is clearly one of the most important sites in the world. From an accidental discovery by a local shepherd in 1994 this unassuming site has produced what is the oldest temple site yet discovered. At approximately 13000 years of age it predates both pottery and writing; thousands of years older than Stonehenge in England or the pyramids of Egypt, these are structures of complexity and artistry and are truly worthy of the over-worked adjective "enigmatic". All the more so because, for no reason that the scientists can identify, the site was deliberately buried some 8000 years BC in a feat that was almost as great as their original construction, and probably more mystifying!

The site consist of a series of slender T shaped megaliths, some weighing in at about 7 tons, decorated with carved animals such as ducks, geese, boar, lions, snakes and scorpions. The megaliths form a number of circular, probably open air chambers, varying from 5 to 10 metres in diameter.

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One of the many carved megaliths forming the chambers



One of the many stone circle chambers at Gobekli Tepe



The Tumulus of Mt Nemrut

Day 9 (continued)

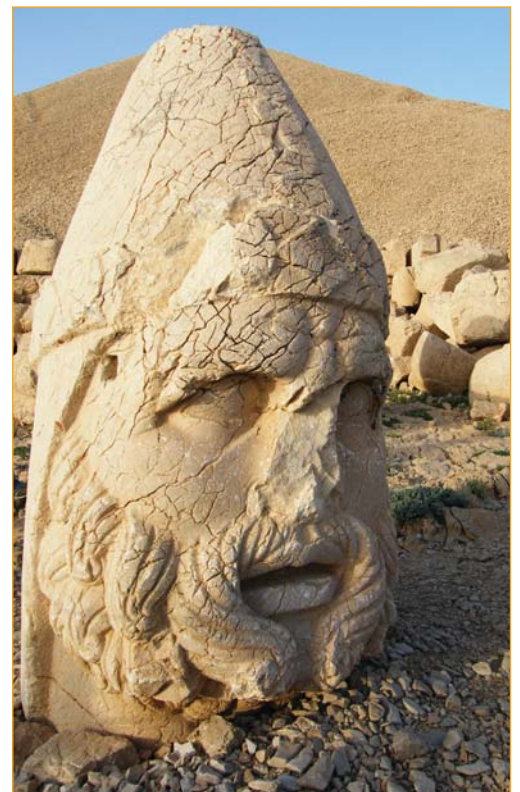
Given the antiquity of the site, the German and Turkish archaeologists working here will have important work to do for many years, especially as many more of these stone circles remain to be excavated. This is a process we at Alkans Tours look forward to being a part of in the years to come. This area, between the Tigris and Euphrates has long been identified as the site of the Biblical Garden of Eden and consequently, speculation and wild theories have sprung up around this site and it's meaning in some number. Hopefully, more solid facts will emerge over the years. For now, we can only wonder at the motivation, artistry and imagination of the builders at Gobekli Tepe.

From the awe inspiring Gobekli Tepe, we carry on with a ferry boat ride on the River Euphrates into the region of Adiyaman to visit the Funerary Monuments on Mt. Nemrut. On a day that can only be described with superlatives, sunset at Mt Nemrut is a fitting conclusion!

It is believed that somewhere under or in the Tumulus lies the body of the King- no one knows. However, if true this would be the only un plundered burial site of this period and would rival the burial of Tutankhamen.



The figures on the east terrace



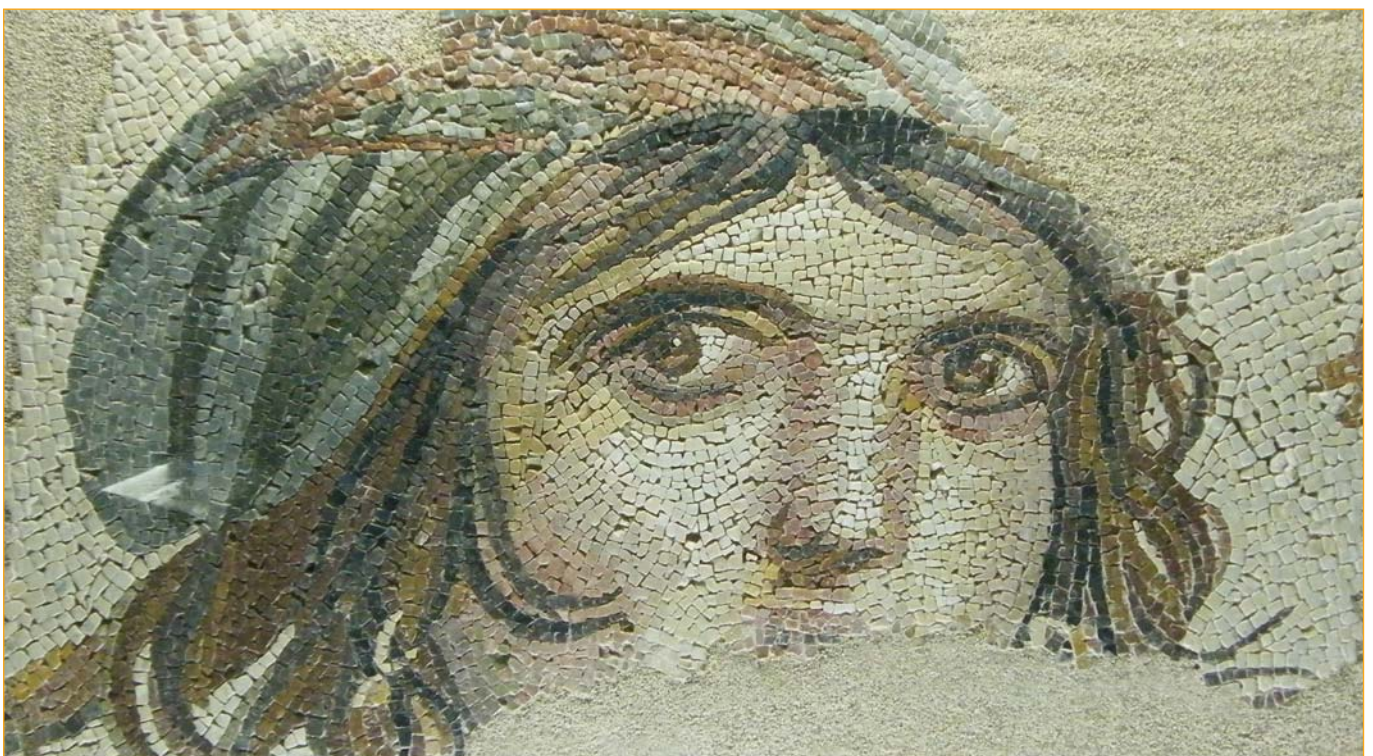


Baklava

Day 10

From Mt Nemrut we travel Gaziantep to taste the delights of the world's capital for Baklava!

We conclude the Eastern part of your tour with a visit to the museum that holds the fabulous Zeugma mosaics before departing for Istanbul in the afternoon.



Alexander the Great?



The busy Bosphorus water way.

Days 11 & 12

Tours of Istanbul. There are a range of possibilities available from this part of your journey- you are free to choose and we are happy to arrange any the you wish. The emphasis here is on what you want to see and do. We recommend the Bosphorus ferry as a relaxing and enjoyable way of seeing this fantastic city and mixing with the locals. The ferry goes from Eminonu next to the famous Galata Bridge, in a zig zag course passing by palaces, castles, mosques and villages along the Bosphorus up to the opening to the Black Sea where it stops at Anadolu Kavagi, the last stop on the Asian side. Here you can enjoy a delicious sea food meal from one of the many fish restaurants before catching the ferry back to the city.

Alternatively you can enjoy the splendours of the Sultanahmet district which contains all the most recognisable monuments of Imperial Constantinople- Aya Sofia, Yerebetan Saray, the Mosaic Museum the Hippodrome. Or Imperial Istanbul- The Blue Mosque, the Topkapi Palace with its Harem, the baths of Roxelana and the Sublime Porte. Not far away are the exquisite Sulemaniye, the apogee of Ottoman architecture, and the covered bazaar.



The incomparable skyline of Istanbul from the water



Built in the 6th century AD- Aya Sophia

Tour Fact Sheet

Group Sizes

Groups need to be at least 10 before they can proceed in this format (arrangements can be made for smaller groups) but will not exceed 20.

Transport and accommodation

Internal flights are by scheduled airlines (Sun Express, Pegasus, Onur or Turkish Airlines). Road transport is by fully air-conditioned coach and all accommodation is in best available hotels with en suite facilities throughout.

What is Included in the cost of your trip?

The price includes all domestic travel, by air and coach, all excursions, museum and site entries, guide, accommodation, all meals (some exceptions in Istanbul as specified in brochure) limited travel insurance under Tursab cover. The price does not include soft drinks and alcoholic beverages and visa.

General Travel Information

This will be provided in a comprehensive Travel Pack and Itinerary when you reserve your place and you will be provided with a travel kit bag on arrival in Turkey.

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