TOUR CODE

TE4

ADVENTURESABROAD

EASTERN & WESTERN TURKEY

27 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 *Arrive in Istanbul*

Today we arrive in Istanbul and transfer to our hotel.

"If one had but a single glance to give the world, one should gaze on Constantinople," marvelled Alphonse de Lamartine, the 19th century French writer and politician. New Rome, Byzantium, Constantinople, Istanbul; the legendary city has served as the capital of the legendary Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. Though no longer a capital, Istanbul is the largest city and the cosmopolitan heart of Turkey, full of marvels and startling contrasts.

Overnight in Istanbul. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Istanbul - Hatay / Antakya*

This morning we fly from Istanbul to Hatay and Antakya, ancient Antioch. On arrival we visit the Hatay Museum, which houses one of the finest collections of Roman mosaics in the world, and Church of St Peter Church. Composed of a cave carved into the mountainside on Mount Starius, this church wasn used by the first Christians in the Antakya region, and is one of Christianity's oldest.

Just outside Antakya, we will pay a visit to the Grotto of St Peter, erected in the 13th century by the Crusaders. It was here that Peter preached his first sermon and founded the first Christian community. Throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Antioch stood out as one of the most influential and enduring cities.

Overnight in Antakya. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Antakya: Samandag & Titus Tunnels*

Today we visit Samandag, southwest of Antakya, to visit the St. Simeon Monastery, built in honour of the Christian ascetic monk Simeon Stylites. Simeon, seeking ever greater isolation, lived his life atop a pillar and preached his wisdom to his many visitors for 39 years. He started a fad of pillar-sitting, and his imitators were called Stylites (style means pillar in Greek). His remains are buried in Antakya, and a vast church was built on the site of his pillar outside of Aleppo, Syria, but this small monastery in Samandag was built to accommodate the many monks who followed in his footsteps.

We then drive to the Titus Tunnels, a canal built by the Romans to divert flood water from the Musa-Dagh massif to the antique harbour of Selukia. After that drive to Vakifli Village, a story-book Armenian village. In the middle of the village stands a church and other buildings distinctive from other villages in the region.

Overnight in Antakya. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Antakya - Mt Nemrut - Adiyaman*

This afternoon we will visit an incredible site, the giant heads on top of Mount Nemrut, 2150 m (7,052 feet). This vast funeral monument, built by the dynastic ruler Antiochus, is unlike anything else in the world with a remote and isolated location at the top of the mountain. Virtually unknown until after the Second World War, the site was first excavated by the American school of Oriental Research in Connecticut some years after the war. Mount Nemrut is often called the "Eighth Wonder of the World".

Overnight in Adiyaman. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Adiyaman - Urfa*

Today we drive via the huge southeast Anatolia irrigation scheme to Urfa, also known as Sanliurfa or "Glorious Urfa" for its role in defending the Turkish Republic. Urfa stands at the edge of the great Mesopotamian Plain. Legend says that it was here that God saved Abraham when an angry Nimrod, the Assyrian king, threw him on a funeral pyre for destroying the pagan idols. To save him, God created a lake known today as the Pool of Abraham which attracts many pilgrims, both Muslim and Christian. We also visit the village of Harran with its unusual beehive houses. The ancient city of Harran is famous for its Biblical association. It was here where Abraham stayed for several years on his way to Canaan.

While in the Urfa area, we will also visit the nearby site of Gobekli Tepe, a Neolithic (stone-age) hilltop sanctuary erected at the top of a mountain ridge. This is the oldest known human-made religious structure, most likely erected by hunter-gatherers in the 10th millennium BCE (c. 12,000 years ago).

Overnight in Urfa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Urfa - Diyarbakir - Mardin*

We depart for the ancient walled city of Diyarbakir. This great old city is enclosed in and protected by black basalt walls, its back protected by the eastern Taurus mountains dominating both the northern Mesopotamian plains and the river Tigris. The protected city lies at the limit of navigability of this mighty river, and so acts as a convenient crossing point. The city has the confidence of a place that has been important for centuries and still the key city of the southeast.

We will take a guided tour of the markets and narrow streets of Diyarbakir. Together we wander, relax and soak up the atmosphere. The city is more Arabic in style than Turkish; it is special in the same way that Aleppo in Syria and Fez in Morocco are special -- they are all cities that have until recently existed within fortified city walls.

We continue to Mardin, perched at the edge of a plateau overlooking the Mesopotamian plain.

Overnight in Mardin. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Mardin Area*

Today we explore the city of Mardin with its labyrinth of narrow streets, historical buildings and stunning scenery over the Mesopotamian plains into Syria. Mardin is the best preserved city in eastern Turkey. Built on steep slopes with a castle atop a hill, it looks like a fantastic medieval stronghold. Its typical stone-carved houses along alleys with long tunnels that stretch underneath houses and old city walls intensify the image even more. As well as being a fascinating

setting, Mardin is also famous for the Syriac, i.e. Syrian Orthodox heritage. South and east of Mardin lies the Tur Abdin, the Holy Land in Syriac language. Here, a lot of churches and monasteries, some dating back more than a thousand years ago, are still used by dwindling groups of priests, monks and believers.

We visit the Saffron Monastery --Deyrul Zafaran -- probably named after the building stonework. Fifteen hundred years old, the monastery is still active. On the hilltop, carved in the rocks, is the ruined monastery of St. Mary's, dating to the beginnings of Christianity.

Overnight in Mardin. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Mardin - Hasankeyf - Van*

Today we will be travelling to Van, the capital of the ancient Urartian empire and later, of an Armenian Kingdom. En route we stop at the ancient city of Hasankeyf. Hasankeyf and its surrounding limestone cliffs are home to thousands of human-made caves, 300 medieval monuments and a unique canyon ecosystem -- all combining to create a beguiling open-air museum. Despite widespread protests from local authorities, archaeologists, architects, preservationists and environmental groups, the massive hydroelectric Ilisu Dam is expected to be completed in 2013. The reservoir created by the dam will inundate the site's caves and flood most of its structures.

We continue toward Van, located in one of Turkey's most remote regions. Indeed, the whole Van area was inaccessible to visitors until 1960. We will take a ferry out to visit the picturesque Akdamar Island on turquoise Lake Van. It is on this island that the famous Armenian Church of the Holy Cross of Akdamar stands, with its impressive reliefs and carvings on the walls of the church. A favourite picnic spot for the locals, the island is a charming place to relax and take in the stunning scenery. From a shady spot under one of the numerous almond trees you can enjoy the view down over the church, with the blue shimmering Lake Van and the beautifully snow-topped mountains beyond.

Overnight in Van. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Van Area*

This morning we will enjoy an excursion to the interesting Urartian hilltop fortress of Van Kalesi. The fortress sits 100m (328 ft) above the lake on a narrow rock outcrop. The Urartians favoured long thin spires for their fortress cities and scattered them all over their empire. Van Kalesi is one of the largest, built with colossal blocks of stone each weighing up to 27000 kg (59,670 lbs). We also visit the museum with its excellent collection of Urartian treasures. During our stay in Van, we hope to see one of the unique Van cats which have one blue and one green eye and are reputed to enjoy swimming!

We also visit the Urartian center of Cavustepe. Built in the 8th century BC, Cavustepe was once home of the kings of Urartu.

This afternoon is at your leisure to wander or to shop. Van is one of the best places in Turkey for hand-crafted Turkish carpets made by nomadic tribes.

Overnight in Van. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Van - Dogubeyazit*

This afternoon we explore the pleasure palace of Ishak Pasha, often called the "Taj Mahal of Turkey". The palace is

located in the wildly remote frontier town of Dogubeyazit on the border between Turkey, Armenia and Iran. Towering above is the magnificent, 5165 m (16,942 ft), snow-capped Mount Ararat, the legendary last resting place of Noah's Ark. The palace built circa 1800 is a mixture of architectural styles, with Seljuk, Persian, Georgian, Armenian and Ottoman elements. At one time the palace had a door plated in gold and studded with precious stones.

Overnight in Dogubeyazit. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Dogubeyazit - Mount Ararat - Kars*

Before leaving our Dogubeyazit hotel we hope that the clouds will disperse allowing a clear view of the magnificent snow-capped peak of Mount Ararat towering above the plains.

Leaving Mount Ararat, we make our way to the frontier town of Kars. Here we visit the haunting "ghost town" ruins of the old Armenian capital, Ani. Entering Ani, the scene of a destroyed city stretching ahead and to the sides over green grassland is indeed eerie. By the middle of the 10th century, nothing in Europe could compare in size and magnificence to Ani and in the east only Constantinople, Cairo and Baghdad were its rivals. The Mongol raids, a severe earthquake in 1319, and the coup de grace of Tamerlane combined to destroy the city. Today the abandoned walls and dozens of churches in red and black sandstone stand eerily at the edge of a deep gorge right on Turkey's eastern border. Several of the churches have beautiful frescoes in the Armenian style.

Overnight in Kars. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Kars - Erzurum*

Erzurum boasts many of Turkey's earliest Islamic buildings. On our tour of the city this afternoon we will see Ezurum's most famous building, the Cifte Minare Madrasa. It was founded in 1253 by the Seljuk Sultan Aleddin Keykubad II in honor of his daughter whose mausoleum is part of the madrasa. We will also see the Lala Pasha Mosque and the Ulu Cami.

Overnight in Erzurum. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Erzurum - Sumela Monastery - Trabzon*

Today we descend from the high plateau through an area that was part of old Georgia, dramatically perched above the Coruh River. Our journey takes us through the spectacular scenery of the Pontic Mountains as we make our way to Trabzon, the birth place of Suleyman the Magnificent. In the 13th Century, Trabzon was the centre of a prosperous Christian empire and contains some beautiful churches, including the beautiful church of Hagia Sophia.

On the way we drive inland up a narrow valley to the Sumela Monastery, clinging high on a sheer rock face above steep and heavily wooded slopes. Founded in the 6th century to house the Icon of the Virgin painted by St. Luke, the monastery was inhabited by Greek Orthodox monks until 1923 when the Greeks were expelled from Turkey. The monks lived here in total isolation, perched high on this remote cliff-side. The monastery still contains many frescoes of biblical scenes painted in the Greek Orthodox style.

Overnight in Trabzon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Trabzon: City Tour*

We will have a morning tour of Trabzon. We include a visit to the Saint Sophia Cathedral, built in the mid 13th century as a monastery church and later converted to a mosque after the Ottoman conquest of 1461. Later used by the Turks as a military storehouse and a fever hospital, it is now a museum with magnificent frescoes covering its walls. Outside the city we will visit Ataturk's beautiful summer mansion situated high on a hillside overlooking the Black Sea.

This afternoon we visit Rize, a city built in an area where bright green tea bushes cover entire mountainsides. From the city we will have a panoramic view of the area and be able to experience its unique beauty. In antiquity the town was called Rhizion (Rhizous, Rhition, Rhitium) and was a port for the territory of Kissioi. In medieval times it was known as Risso. In 1461 after Mehmet II captured Trebizond it became part of the Ottoman Empire.

This afternoon you will have free time to explore the old walled city.

Overnight in Trabzon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Trabzon - Istanbul*

Today we fly from Trabzon to Istanbul with the balance of the day at leisure in this magical city.

Overnight in Istanbul. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Istanbul: Hippodrome & Agia Sophia*

We start our day with a panoramic drive around the Golden Horn and the great walls of Constantinople. The first recorded bridge over the Golden Horn was built during the reign of Justinian the Great in the 6th century at the western end of the city, and today we will pass the famous Galata Bridge and the Ataturk Bridge. As we drive along the Byzantine city gates and walls we will view the towering minarets of Suleyman's Mosque and the Galata Tower before arriving in Sultanahmet Square.

We'll begin the walking component of today's tour at the legendary Blue Mosque, built between 1609 and 1616 by Mehmet Aga. The inside is covered by more than 20,000 Iznik tiles. At the adjacent Hippodrome you will see the remains of the great sports stadium where chariot races were held in Roman and Byzantine times. We will also see an Egyptian obelisk, a giant needle of stone carved for the Pharaoh Tutmoses III around 1500 BC and brought to Constantinople by the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius in AD 390.

We continue to the church of Agia Sophia (St Sophia), built by the Emperor Justinian in 548 BC. It was the largest church in the Christian world for nearly 1,000 years. When the Ottoman Turks conquered the city in 1435 one of the first things they did was to convert St Sophia into a mosque. Today it is a museum featuring many beautiful Christian mosaics.

Outside Agia Sophia we descend underground to the gigantic cisterns that contained the vast water supply that allowed Constantinople to withstand so many long sieges. Here the many columns are reflected in the water while classical music plays quietly.

Balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Istanbul. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Istanbul - Gallipoli - Troy - Canakkale*

After breakfast we drive along the Sea of Marmara through the small European part of Turkey known as Thrace. Only 3% of Turkey is in Europe, the other 97% known as Anatolia, is in Asia. One of the fascinations of Turkey is the huge number of peoples and empires that have occupied this land.

Before leaving Europe we visit Gallipoli, Gelibolu in Turkish. This narrow, mountainous peninsula on the northwestern side of the Dardanelles has seen more than its share of history with countless civilizations having battled for control over these straits for over 3,000 years. This is the historic World War I battleground where Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, father of the Turkish Republic, first rose to prominence. Under the direction of Winston Churchill, an unsuccessful naval and land campaign failed in its attempt to capture Gallipoli, open up the Dardanelles, and seize Constantinople. This battleground is now marked with over 30 memorials.

We then cross the Dardanelles waterway by ferry from Europe to Asia where we visit the ruins of Troy where Greek and Trojan heroes fought for the beautiful Helen. Troy had been accepted as a lengendary city for ages, but very few people believed in its true existence. Heinrich Schliemann excavated here at this own expense in the 1870s and discovered the spot where a sophisticated settlement had existed for centuries. As you stand on the ancient hilltop you can look out over the plain of Troy and feel the famous cool north wind blowing from the Dardanelles.

Overnight in Canakkale. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Canakkale - Pergamon - Kusadasi*

We have an early start today, travelling down the rugged Aegean coast and inland to the typically Turkish rural town of Bergama. Here we visit the Akropolis and Asklepion of the Roman city of Pergamon, said to be one of the first hospitals in the world. We see a carving of two snakes wrapped around a drinking cup (a modern symbol of the medical profession), and a theatre where the mentally disturbed would allegedly act out their emotions (a forerunner of today's psychoanalysis?).

Later we travel through Izmir, Turkey's most important port. Here the blind poet Homer was born when the city was known as Smyrna. Also here in 1922 the Turks expelled the invading Greeks from Turkish soil during the Turkish War of Independence.

We continue to Kusadasi, a beautiful port city with a small island fortress. The island, attached to the mainland, gives the city its name: Kusadasi, "The Island of Birds."

Overnight in Kusadasi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Kusadasi: Ephesus*

Today we visit Ephesus, one of the highlights of any visit to Turkey. During its Golden Age, the city was adorned with splendid monuments, theatres, agoras and libraries. The protectress of the city was the goddess Artemis whose temple, dating back to 1300 BC, was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. As a prosperous trade and banking centre, Ephesus had a cosmopolitan population. It has been recorded that St John brought the Virgin Mary to Ephesus where she spent her last days after the death of Christ. On our tour of Ephesus we see a 24,000 seat amphitheatre, the Library of Celsus, and the marble-paved Arcadian Way. We also include the special Terrace Houses section, which provides fascinating insight into family life during the Roman period.

In addition to the main site of Ephesus we will visit the superb Ephesus Museum. We also visit the traditional town of Selcuk with its many beautiful buildings, including the Isa Bey Mosque (built in 1307), remains of old Turkish baths, and a hill crowned by the Ayasoluk Fortress.

Overnight in Kusadasi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 20 *Kusadasi - Didyma - Bodrum: Crusader Castle of St Peter*

Today we travel southward along the Aegean coast on winding roads through fields and olive groves to Bodrum. En route we stop at Didyma, an ancient Ionian shrine and the most renowned oracle of the Hellenic world, containing a temple and an oracle of Apollo.

Bodrum is the site of one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: the Mausoleum. This was also the birthplace of the Greek historian Herodotus. Today Bodrum's whitewashed houses scattered on the hillside overlook the perfect natural harbour.

This afternoon we visit the Crusader Castle of St Peter which dominates Bodrum Bay. The castle was built by the Knights Hospitaller in the early 15th century. Today the castle houses an excellent museum, mainly dedicated to the artifacts retrieved from the many ancient shipwrecks discovered off the Turkish coast. Many of the pieces in the museum have been excavated from below the sea bed by teams of archaeologists from Texas A&M University.

Overnight in Bodrum. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 21 *Bodrum: Day at Leisure*

Today is free to enjoy the ambience of this beautiful town.

Overnight in Bodrum. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 22 *Bodrum - Kas*

Leaving Bodrum we head over the coastal fringes of the Taurus Mountains to the warm Mediterranean coast, called the 'Turquoise Coast' because of the exquisite blueness of the sea. The picturesque fishing village of Kas has a quaint harbour, carved tombs in the mountain behind, an ancient Lycian amphitheatre, a Lycian tomb, and the Greek island of Kastellorizo just off shore.

Overnight in Kas. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 23 *Kas - Gulet Cruise - Kas*

Today we cruise the Mediterranean on a wooden yacht, relaxing, sun bathing and stopping to swim at leisure. Our itinerary is open-ended today in order to account for local weather conditions, though our likely itinerary will include Tersane, Kekova submerged ruins, and the fortress at Simena. At some of these sites, foundations of houses and rock hewn staircases with outlines of buildings can be seen almost at the water's surface. There are several excellent places to moor for swimming and sightseeing.

Overnight in Kas. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 24 *Kas - Antalya*

Today we travel along the Lycian Coast visiting the rock tombs of Myra and the Church of St Nicholas -- the original Father Christmas -- on the way to Antalya. Before reaching Antalya we stop at Phaselis, one of the mst spectacular Roman cities on the coast, located on a narrow peninsula between pine forests and three natural harbours.

Overnight in Antalya. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 25 *Antalya - Perge - Aspendos - Antalya*

We visit the vast Roman site of Perge where St Paul is said to have preached his first sermon. Here are the ruins of a huge theatre with impressive marble relief work, fountains, a colonnaded steam bath and basilica. Nearby is the well preserved amphitheatre at Aspendos, which the Romans designed so brilliantly that natural acoustics allow someone sitting in the furthest seats to hear a person speaking in a normal voice down in the orchestra area. We will also see the aqueduct that brought water from the mountains to the city.

We return to Antalya and visit the excellent museum containing early Christian icons and Roman tombs with some of the best examples of Roman sculpture of Asia Minor.

Overnight in Antalya. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 26 *Antalya - Istanbul*

This morning we take the 75 minute flight from Antalya to Istanbul and transfer to our hotel.*

This afternoon you may explore Istanbul, a city crowded with beautiful mosques, churches and palaces. The Grand Bazaar and Spice Bazaar beckon for last-minute shopping. For a relaxing break, you may want to take an optional ferry ride up the Bosphorous to the Black Sea. Along the shores of the Bosphorous are many Summer Palaces and old wooden houses dating from Ottoman times.

* Your Tour Leader may not accompany you to Istanbul as s/he will be continuing to Capadoccia on a longer tour option. Your arrival and time in Istanbul will be managed by a local agent.

Overnight in Istanbul. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 27 *Departure*

Departure from Istanbul.

IYI YOLCULUKLAR! Meal plan: Breakfast.