

TURKEY'S TURQUOISE COAST

Featuring a Gulet Cruise

12 days

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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. Today we arrive in this legendary city that has served as the beating heart of three mighty empires. Istanbul straddles two continents at the confluence of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus, making it the only city in the world to span Europe and Asia. New Rome, Byzantium, Constantinople, Istanbul---each name tells a chapter in humanity's greatest urban story. The Romans built their eastern capital here, the Byzantines created a Christian empire that lasted a thousand years, and the Ottomans forged their Islamic dynasty from these same ancient stones.

Overnight in Istanbul.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Istanbul: Hippodrome & Agia Sophia

Dawn breaks over a city divided by waterways into three distinct parts---two in Europe, one in Asia---creating Istanbul's unique character as the world's only transcontinental metropolis. We begin with a panoramic drive around the Golden Horn, following the massive walls that protected Constantinople for over a thousand years.

The first bridge here was built during Justinian's reign in the 6th century, and today we pass the famous Galata Bridge where fishermen still cast their lines as they have for centuries. The towering minarets of Süleyman's Mosque and the medieval Galata Tower guide us towards Sultanahmet Square, where the heart of old Constantinople awaits.

Our walking exploration begins at the legendary Blue Mosque, built between 1609 and 1616 by Mehmet Aa. Inside, over 20,000 hand-painted znik tiles create a symphony of blue that gives the mosque its popular name. At the adjacent Hippodrome, we stand where 100,000 Romans once cheered chariot races. Here stands an Egyptian obelisk carved for Pharaoh Thutmose III around 1500 BC---older than Christ, yet brought here by Byzantine Emperor Theodosius in 390 AD.

We continue to Hagia Sophia, built by Emperor Justinian in 548 AD as the largest church in Christendom for nearly a millennium. When Ottoman forces conquered the city in 1453, they transformed this Christian cathedral into an Islamic mosque. In 1934, it became a museum; in 2020, President Erdoan controversially returned it to mosque status, though visitors are still welcome.

Beneath Hagia Sophia lies another marvel---the colossal Basilica Cistern. Using columns plundered from ruined temples, Emperor Justinian created this underground cathedral to store water for his Great Palace. Walking through this subterranean wonder, we understand why the Byzantine Empire was history's greatest engineering civilization.

The remainder of the afternoon is yours to explore before our evening meal. Your Tour Leader can show you to Istanbul's famous Grand Bazaar -- even if you're not a keen shopper, the atmosphere and goods on offer offer interesting local insights into life in the city, the old and the new.

Note: You may wonder why we choose not to include Topkapi Palace in our program. While it's an important site with a long storied history, the nature of the facility and the rules pertaining to visitation, ie limits on groups and guiding to reduce crowding and noise, make it better-suited to a self-guided, rather than a group touring, experience. Should you want to visit on your own, please consult your Tour Leader in advance.

* Due to periodic closures for restorations, we may substitute the nearby Cistern of Philoxenos, also known as the Binbirdirek Sarnici or "Cistern of 1,001 Columns."

Overnight in Istanbul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Canada/USA
1-800-665-3998

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sales@adventures-abroad.com

Day 3 Istanbul - Antalya

A morning flight (75 min) takes us south to Antalya, located in the region called Pamphylia and founded by Attalus II, King of Pergamum in the 2nd century BC.

On arrival we will visit the excellent Antalya Archaeology Museum, then continue to Perge. Built around 1000 BC, Perge boasts a beautiful theater and the largest stadium in all Asia Minor. Alexander spent time here, as did the mathematician Appolonius. The city was by turns Pamphilian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Selcuk. We then visit Aspendos and the best-preserved theater in Asia Minor which is still used for performances.

Overnight in Antalya.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Antalya - Myra - Demre: Gulet Cruise

Today we drive southwest toward Finike via the ruins of Myra and the Church of St. Nicholas (3rd century). Myra boasts one of the most colossal and well-preserved Roman amphitheaters in the world, complete with stone masks of the performers lying about. We explore 4th century BC Lycian house-tombs with richly-decorated facades carved out of the rock.

At nearby Demre we board our gulet and head west skirting the indented coast. As a point of interest, Demre is where the legend of Father Christmas ("Noel Baba" in Turkish) is said to have originated with a Christian bishop who gave dowries to penniless girls. The bishop became known as St. Nicholas.

OUR BOAT: Gulets are wooden boats, traditionally hand made by master craftsmen from the Bodrum area of Turkey. This classic gulet was once used by fisherman and sponge divers to transport their catch. Today they are purpose-built for the charter market with fittings and equipment designed for guests' comfort. A gulet is typically built of pine wood and styled with a pointed fore and round aft. The major difference between the Turkish and Western boats is that the Turkish boats are designed to allow passengers more space on the deck. The Bodrum built boats take as much advantage as they can of the pleasant climate of the south. An aft deck for dining and lounging in the shade of a sun awning and a forward deck with numerous sunbeds. Large living areas, air-conditioned twin-berth cabins (with WC, shower) and a sun deck furnished lounge area are typical. On deck there are sun lounges for sunbathing and relaxing as well as dining areas under sun awnings. Our gulet will range in size, depending on number of group participants.

NOTE: single cabins are limited in number. Late single supplement requests may need to double up on the gulet portion of the tour. The actual order of places visited may vary due to variables such as weather and other considerations.

The pace is, of course, relaxed with plenty of time for swimming, snorkelling and sunbathing on deck. During the day our gulet navigates for about 4 hours at most, stopping in the bays and isolated islands for swimming breaks or short visits to the shore. In some places where the gulet can dock close to the shore, you will be able to travel by smaller boat (dinghy) to the shore for a walk or to visit a place. Most of the places you visit are of historical and natural importance.

Overnight on Gulet.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Kekova - Kas - Kalkan

The Gulf of Kekova is one of the most picturesque stretches of the coast and has several bays. On Kekova, there is no trace of the city which once dominated the island -- its ruins and foundations can now only be seen under the surface of the clear water on the northern side of the island. The name "Kekova" is Turkish for "plain of thyme" and describes the region encompassing the island of Kekova, the villages of Kalekoy and Ucagiz and the three ancient town of Simena. We will have a chance to hike to Kalekoy, a pastoral village crowned by a Crusader castle with dozens of impressive Roman sarcophagi strewn around its base.

Kas is just a little further on, and is slightly larger and more developed than its neighbours but still very charming, with streets and shops leading down to the sea. Kas was one of the earliest settlements of the Lycian era, when it was called Antiphellos. A large sarcophagus dominates the centre of town, and the sheer rock face overlooking Kas is dotted with Lycian rock tombs. After touring the village on foot (1

hr) we reach our anchorage at Kalkan for the night.

Overnight on Gulet.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 Oludeniz & Gemiler Island

Today we stop at Oludeniz, the "Dead Sea," below the resorts of Ovacik and Hisaronu. This azure lagoon, now part of a nature park, features on countless Turkish travel posters and is one of Turkey's iconic sights. The area southeast of the lagoon, fronting onto an attractive sandy beach, has developed into the popular resort village of Belcegiz -- though it is far more commonly referred to, even by locals, as Oludeniz.

After a chance to swim and lunch and enjoy this pretty spot, we sail to Gemiler Island where we can hike to the 6th C. ruins of a Byzantine monastic society. This tiny islet is sprinkled with ruined monastic buildings, Byzantine dwellings and churches -- one believed to have been the original burial place of St. Nicholas, the inspiration behind Father Christmas.

Overnight on Gulet.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 Aga Bay - Lydea - Hamam Cove

This morning we can hike from Aga Bay to Lydea (3 hrs, optional), an ancient Lycian Oracle reached only by foot. This is one of the most spectacular hikes in the region -- high, rocky ridge tops with pine forests, shepherds' homesteads, and the aroma of natural herb gardens of oregano, thyme and sage lingering in the air.

We then continue to Hamam Cove, a wonderful stop with unbelievably beautiful sea and coastal scenery. In a typical Mediterranean fashion, local people are convinced that Cleopatra once swam here and so the site is often called Cleopatra Cove. We can swim and snorkel, searching for sponges, octopus and fish. An easy walk takes us along the cove. Then we sail towards our anchoring point for the evening.

Overnight on Gulet.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Arrival in Fethiye: Disembark

Today we sail into Fethiye where we bid our gulet crew farewell and retire to a hotel.

Fethiye is a sizeable-yet-relaxed town with a friendly vibe and international atmosphere. It has grown from a modest trading port/fishing village and fertile tomato growing area to a rapidly expanding vibrant town and tourist holiday destination which offers many things to many people, from those with an interest in history and nature to those looking for sun, sea and great food.

While in Fethiye we will visit the cave tombs, located in the cliff on the south side of town. We will also see the Lycian sarcophagus -- there are a number of stone sarcophagii carved in typical Lycian style scattered around the town, with one of the most preserved ones lying in the yard of town governor's office. The Fethiye Amphitheatre, a coastal amphitheatre dating back to Hellenistic times (as far back as Alexander the Great), is also worth a look.

Overnight in Fethiye.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Fethiye - Bodrum: Crusader Castle of St Peter

After breakfast we drive to Bodrum, 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. It's delightful to wander along the palm-lined marina in the evening and marvel at the yachts from all over the world.

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's A&M University.

Overnight in Bodrum.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Bodrum - Didyma - Kusadasi

After a free morning in Bodrum, we travel northward along the Aegean coast, on winding roads through fields and olive groves, toward Kusadasi, a beautiful port city with a small island fortress. 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.

Kusadasi has rapidly developed into one of the most popular seaside resorts of the coast and was most probably founded on the ancient site of Neopolis. Because of its beautiful location and its excellent hotels, it is an ideal base for Ephesus.

Overnight in Kusadasi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Kusadasi - Ephesus Site Tour - Istanbul

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 protector 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.

We proceed to Izmir for a late afternoon flight to Istanbul.

Overnight in Istanbul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Departure

Departure from Istanbul.

IYI YOLCULUKLAR/BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast