Tour Code
TQ2

ADVENTURESABROAD

TURKEY'S TURQUOISE COAST

Featuring a Gulet Cruise & Cappadocia

18 days

Created on: 28 Mar, 2024

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," marveled 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.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Istanbul: Hippodrome & Agia Sophia

Istanbul straddles the confluence of two waterways, the Golden Horn and the Bosphorous. The city is divided by these waterways into three parts -- two parts are in Europe and one part is in Asia, making Istanbul the only city in the world spread over two continents! The city is crowded with beautiful mosques, churches and palaces.

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. We will see the interior, where the walls and ceiling are covered by more than 20,000 Iznik tiles. At the adjacent Hippodrome we 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. In 1934 the building was deconsecrated and converted to a museum; however, in 2020, Pres. Erdogan made the controversial decision to convert the building back into a mosque, though it remains open to visitors (please note that the ongoing conversion/renovations may limit our visit to certain areas or result in some features being covered, rendering them unviewable).

Outside Agia Sophia we descend underground to the gigantic Basilica Cisterns.* These are the largest of several hundred ancient cisterns that lie beneath the city of Istanbul. Like most sites in Istanbul, the cistern has a colourful history. Constructed using columns, capitals and plinths from ruined buildings, the cistern's symmetry and sheer grandeur of conception are quite extraordinary. This immense underground water container was built during the reign of Emperor Justinian I in 532 to meet the water needs of the Great Palace. This marvelous piece of engineering only confirms yet again that those were the heydays of the Byzantine Empire.

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

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 rage 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

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Kusadasi - Aphrodisias - Pamukkale

After breakfast we leave the Aegean coast and drive along the winding Menderes River Valley, which gives its name to the geographical term referring to a winding, or meandering river.

We visit the impressive Roman site of Aphrodisias, named after Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Much of the site's excavation has been funded by the National Geographic Society. Aphrodisias is the location of one of the greatest schools of sculpture in antiquity; the museum here contains some magnificent pieces.

We continue to Pamukkale where mineral-rich water breaks through the earth's surface and cascades down the hillsides creating terraces of white chalk-like stone. We visit the ruins of Hierapolis before checking in to our hotel.

Overnight in Pamukkale.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Pamukkale - Konya

We have a morning departure for the mystical city of Konya, birthplace of the Whirling Dervishes and capital of the Seljuk Empire. En route we pass by Lake Egirdir. Two islands, connected by a causeway to the mainland, extend the town of Egirdir far out into the lake's fish-filled waters.

During the sightseeing tour of Konya we will visit the Mausoleum and Museum of Mevlana, home of the famous Whirling Dervishes; as well as the ceramics museum of Karatay, once an Islamic school, built in 1251.

Overnight in Konya.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Konya - Cappadocia

Today we drive across the flat Anatolian Plateau to Cappadocia. Along the way we visit the caravanserai of Sultanhani. Caravanserai were fortified, medieval inns located one day's journey apart, for the protection of travelling merchants. This encouraged merchants and their caravans of silks and spices travelling the "Silk Route" to trade in Turkish lands, thus promoting commerce.

Overnight near Cappadocia.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Cappadocia Area

Today we will spend a full day exploring this unique and fascinating lunar landscape with its fairy chimneys and conical towers topped with huge, delicately balanced rocks. Here the elements have weathered layers of volcanic dust into giant cones and mushrooms 9m (30 feet) high! Most of the chapels date from the Byzantine period of the 10th and 11th centuries.

In the Goreme Valley we will see the many churches carved into this landscape with their wonderful paintings and frescoes. This monastic complex of rock chapels covered with frescoes is one of the best known sites in Central Anatolia. We will visit the underground city of Kaymakli one of the many cities dug into the soft rock of Cappadocia. At Kaymakli there are at least eight levels in the underground city, four of which are currently open to the public. The city is an elaborate network of tunnels, stairways and chambers hollowed out of the rock. It served as a safe haven during times of unrest and protected its citizens from marauding armies.

Optional Activites:

Weather-permitting, you might choose to fly over the region by hot-air balloon at sunrise. We do not include this activity as it is not necessarily of interest to all, but this can be booked with Tour Leader assistance upon arrival on tour (more info in your pre-trip package).

This evening, those who wish may attend a performance of Turkish traditional dances from Turkey's many regions (optional).

Overnight near Cappadocia.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Cappadocia - Tuz Golu - Ankara & Museum of Anatolian Civilizations

Our drive today takes us to a salt lake called Tuz Golu. We travel through the village of Uchisar, clustered around the Uchisar Fortress, and the village of Urgup which was, according to documents found in the Middle Ages, a bishop's residence.

We continue to Ankara, Turkey's modern capital. Ankara was an ancient trading town before the Romans arrived; its name is derived from the angora wool of the goats sold here. Ataturk, founder of the Turkish Republic, made Ankara the capital rather than Istanbul to break with the discredited Ottoman Empire after World War I.

We visit the Mausoleum of Ataturk before our visit to one of the best museums in the world -- the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations. The museum contains a superb collection dating back to the settlement at Catal Huyuk in 7500 BC and includes pieces from the Phrygian, Urartian, Assyrian and mighty Hittite Empires.

Please note: The inclusion of Ankara on our tour is currently under review and may be adjusted due to inconvenient train/flight connections back to Istanbul. We will continue to assess ever-changing conditions and travellers' feedback and will make a change if logistics warrant.

Overnight in Ankara.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Ankara - Istanbul: Topkapi Palace

Today we travel to Istanbul via high-speed train (3.5 hours).

On arrival we will visit the Topkapi Palace, the great palace of the Ottoman sultans from the mid-fifteenth to the early nineteenth century. It was from this vast complex of buildings that the mighty Ottoman Empire was organised. Today it is a huge museum containing ceremonial robes in silk and gold thread, Japanese and Chinese porcelain, European clocks, miniature paintings depicting Ottoman courtly life and one of the largest jewelry collections in the world. You may choose to end your visit with a look at the Topkapi Harem, where the sultans' many "wives" were kept in isolated splendour, before leaving the palace (optional approx +/-9 USD entrance fee).

Overnight in Istanbul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Departure

Departure from Istanbul.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast