Tour Code
TE10

ADVENTURESABROAD

EASTERN TURKIYE

'The Land Beyond the Seas'

14 days

Created on: 15 Nov, 2026

Day 1 Arrival in Ankara

Arrival in Ankara, Turkiye's modern capital.

Ankara offers a unique blend of ancient history and modern urban life. It's a city that's often overlooked by tourists, but it's well worth a visit. For those arriving early enough (or if you have booked an extra hotel night), a highlight is the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, which showcases artifacts from ancient Anatolia.

Later today, you may be joining other travellers coming from our tour of Western Turkiye, accompanied by your Tour Leader.

Overnight in Ankara.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Ankara - Hattusas - Samsun

This morning we embark on a scenic drive north toward the Black Sea, pausing at Corum to explore Hattusa, the extraordinary capital of the Hittite Empire and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Between 1650 and 1200 BC, the Hittites ruled an empire that rivalled Egypt and Babylon, controlling the trade routes between Europe and Asia from this strategic Anatolian stronghold. They were master diplomats and formidable warriors — the first civilisation to work iron systematically, and pioneers of international law. The peace treaty they signed with Egypt after the Battle of Kadesh remains history's earliest known diplomatic agreement between great powers.

Walking through Hattusa's massive lion gates, royal palace foundations, and temple complexes, the scale of this Bronze Age superpower becomes tangible. These were not primitive people on the edge of history — they were contemporaries of Ramesses II, conducting correspondence in cuneiform across half the known world.

The drive continues north as the landscape shifts dramatically — the dry Anatolian plateau giving way to forested hills and then the first green glimpse of the Black Sea coast. By evening we reach Samsun, Turkiye's most important Black Sea port. It was here on 19 May 1919 that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stepped ashore to begin the Turkish War of Independence — transforming a defeated, partitioned Ottoman Empire into the modern Turkish Republic within four years. A city that witnessed an empire's end and a nation's beginning.

Overnight in Samsun.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Samsun - Black Sea Coast - Trabzon

Our journey continues eastward along Turkiye's dramatic Black Sea coast to Trabzon, the "Byzantium in Exile" that has captivated travellers from Marco Polo to Rose Macaulay. This ancient port city served as capital of the Trebizond Empire after Constantinople fell to the Fourth Crusade in 1204, maintaining Byzantine culture and Orthodox Christianity for another 250 years.

We begin at the 13th-century Church of Hagia Sophia, built by Emperor Manuel I on the site of an earlier pagan temple. After suffering centuries of damage and neglect, the church's magnificent Byzantine frescoes---among the world's finest examples of late Byzantine art---were painstakingly restored during the 1960s. Inside, vivid scenes from the Old Testament and the life of Christ demonstrate the spiritual intensity and artistic sophistication of medieval Orthodoxy.

Our walking tour of old Trabzon reveals layers of history stretching back 2,700 years. Milesian Greek colonists settled here in the 7th century BC, attracted by the metal trade and the natural harbour created by a table-like headland---giving the city its ancient name Trapezous, meaning "table."

We explore the Tabakhane Bridge, ancient city walls, and the Middle City before reaching the Ortahisar Mosque, originally Trabzon's main

Byzantine cathedral where emperors celebrated weddings, funerals, and coronations. At the Upper Citadel, we stand where the Imperial Palace once overlooked the dramatic ravine that provides Trabzon's natural defences.

Crossing the medieval Zagnos Bridge, we conclude at the Ottoman Mosque of Gülbahar Hatun, demonstrating how Islamic architecture adapted Byzantine traditions to create uniquely Turkish sacred spaces.

Overnight in Trabzon.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Trabzon - Sumela Monastery - Erzurum

This morning we venture deep into the Pontic Mountains to discover Sumela Monastery, one of Orthodox Christianity's most spectacular and sacred sites. According to tradition, the Athenian monk Barnabas discovered here in 385 AD the miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary believed painted by St. Luke himself.

The monastery developed during the 6th century, though the surviving buildings date mainly to the 13th and 14th centuries when Byzantine emperors of the Komnenos dynasty celebrated their coronations at this remote mountain sanctuary. The icon's miraculous powers became so famous that even Ottoman sultans made offerings here, demonstrating the respect Turkish rulers showed for Christian holy sites.

We ascend through lush forest along a winding path---about 250 metres of gentle climbing that takes approximately 30 minutes. Suddenly, the monastery appears, seemingly impossible, clinging to a sheer cliff face 300 metres above the valley floor. This first glimpse creates an unforgettable moment of wonder and spiritual awe.

Though now partially ruined, brilliant frescoes still adorn the main chapel's interior, depicting religious scenes with the distinctive intensity of late Byzantine art. Exploring Sumela's cells, chapels, and galleries carved into living rock, we understand how generations of monks created a complete spiritual community in this vertical sanctuary.

Breaking for lunch en route to Erzurum where you can sample regional specialities of the eastern Black Sea: lahana corbasi (cabbage soup), hamsi (anchovies), and muhlama---melted cheese served with bread that reflects the area's dairy-farming traditions.

Overnight in Erzurum.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Erzurum - Kars & Ani

Before departing Erzurum we visit the Cifte Minareli Medrese & Ulu Camii. The Twin Minaret Seminary dates to 1253, built under the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum at the height of their power in Anatolia. The facade is the thing — that elaborately carved stone portal flanked by two brick minarets tiled in deep blue, each capped with a muqarnas balcony. The stonework on the entrance rivals anything in the Islamic world for geometric intricacy. Inside, the twin iwans and open courtyard follow the classic Central Asian madressa plan — the Seljuks carried this architectural vocabulary west from Persia and Central Asia all the way to Anatolia.

The Ulu Camii (Grand Mosque) next door is older — 12th century, also Seljuk, one of the earliest mosques in Anatolia. Seven naves running parallel to the qibla wall, a forest of columns, austere and powerful. No Ottoman ornamentation — this is Islam as the Seljuks understood it, severe and geometric. Together they represent Erzurum at its medieval peak — a major Silk Road city, prosperous, cosmopolitan, and thoroughly Seljuk before the Mongols arrived and changed everything.

Our journey then continues toward Kars and one of history's most haunting archaeological treasures. Our destination lies at Turkiye's Armenian border, where the ghost capital of Ani once rivalled Constantinople itself. This medieval Armenian city housed over 100,000 souls beneath a thousand church spires. By the 10th century CE, "no city in Europe could compare in size and magnificence to Ani," recorded chroniclers. This afternoon we understand why as we walk among red and black sandstone ruins crowning this dramatic gorge.

Mongol raids, the devastating 1319 earthquake, and Tamerlane's final assault transformed this glorious metropolis into today's haunting ruin. We explore the Cathedral of Ani, its soaring arches still defiant against time, and trace Armenian frescoes that have survived seven centuries. The Church of St. Gregory reveals intricate stonework that speaks to medieval Armenian artistry at its pinnacle.

From the precipice where city walls plunge into the Arpacay Gorge, we gaze across no-man's land toward modern Armenia—a reminder that borders shift while Ani's stones remain eternal witnesses. The wind carries whispers of merchants who once filled these streets, of pilgrims who worshipped in these sanctuaries, of a civilization that flourished at the crossroads of empires.

Overnight in Kars.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Kars - Ishak Pasa Sarayi - Lake Van

Mount Ararat dominates the eastern horizon as we depart Kars, its snow-capped peak at 5165 metres (16,946 feet) earning the Arabic designation "roof of the world." According to Genesis, this sacred mountain cradled Noah's Ark as floodwaters receded.

Our destination, located near Dogubeyazit, is Ishak Pasa Sarayi, perched impossibly on a mountainside like an architectural marvel suspended between earth and sky. This 18th-century palace represents brilliant synthesis—Ottoman, Persian, Armenian, and Georgian design traditions merged in honey-coloured stone. Built by a Kurdish chieftain and completed by Ishak Pasa in 1784, the palace once boasted doors plated in gold and studded with precious stones. We explore courtyards and chambers where each room reveals different architectural influences. The palace's strategic position overlooking Turkiye, Armenia, and Iran reminds us of Kurdish chieftains' vital role controlling mountain trade routes.

After a break for lunch nearby, we continue westward through spectacular mountain landscapes. Lake Van emerges like an inland sea, stretching 119 kilometres (74 miles) across the Anatolian plateau. This extraordinary body—Turkiye's largest lake and the world's largest soda lake—was born from volcanic drama when Mount Nemrut's lava flows blocked the basin's natural outlet millions of years ago.

We arrive in Van with time for proper rest after our journey.

Overnight in Van.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Lake Van Comprehensive Touring

Today we explore Lake Van's remarkable treasures. The lake's unique alkaline chemistry—four times saltier than seawater—creates an environment supporting endemic species including the famous Van cat with mismatched eyes and pearl mullet. These turquoise waters reach 450-metre (1,476-foot) depths, reflecting surrounding mountains in shades that change hourly.

Our morning boat ride across Lake Van's azure waters carries us toward Akdamar Island, rising like a jewel just two kilometres (1.2 miles) offshore. The 10th-century Armenian Church of the Holy Cross stands as medieval architecture's masterpiece, its red tuff stone walls alive with intricate relief carvings. King Gagik I Ardzruni commissioned this marvel between 915-921 CE. Exterior walls flow with carved narratives: Adam and Eve, Jonah and the whale, David facing Goliath. Inside, medieval fresco fragments whisper stories of Armenian Christianity's golden age, when this island served as the Armenian Patriarch's seat.

We break for lunch near the lakeshore before continuing to Van Castle, the commanding rocky outcrop serving as the Urartian empire's administrative heart. From this dramatic citadel known as Tushpa, Urartian kings commanded territories stretching from the Caucasus to northern Iraq. Stone battlements, temple ruins, and royal tombs bear cuneiform inscriptions revealing Bronze Age civilization's sophisticated administration.

Time permitting, we visit Van Museum, where the remarkable Urartian civilization comes to life through intricate gold jewellery revealing a sophisticated culture that controlled trade routes linking Mesopotamia with Anatolia. Please note that the museum may be undergoing renovations and a visit may not be possible.

Overnight in Van.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Lake Van - Adiyaman

We embark upon our journey westward through eastern Anatolia's rugged magnificence toward Mount Nemrut's foot. This route traces ancient pathways connecting Armenian highlands with Mesopotamian plains, carrying us through landscapes witnessing countless civilizations' rise and fall.

The road winds through spectacular Bitlis Canyon, where geological forces carved deep gorges over millions of years. Sheer cliffs tower above rushing waters as we navigate this dramatic terrain. We pass Kurdish villages where traditional life continues as it has for centuries, crossing boundaries between ancient kingdoms—Urartian, Commagene, and Roman territories that once contested control over these vital mountain passes.

Changing vegetation and architecture tell our westward progress story: Armenian plateau's harsh beauty gradually giving way to anti-Taurus ranges separating Anatolia from Mesopotamia.

Our destination, Adiyaman, sits in attractive countryside at Mount Nemrut's foot, serving as gateway to archaeology's most extraordinary discoveries. The population here is predominantly Kurdish, descended from the Reshwan tribe calling these mountains home for generations.

As evening approaches and Mount Nemrut's distinctive 2150-metre (7,054-foot) profile becomes visible against darkening sky, anticipation builds for tomorrow's pre-dawn ascent. The summit ahead conceals the ancient world's most audacious artistic achievement—a fusion of Greek, Persian, and Armenian religious traditions that defied the gods themselves.

Overnight in Adiyaman.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Adiyaman: Mount Nemrut - Yeni Kale - Cendere Bridge & Karakus Tumulus

This morning we make our way up Mount Nemrut toward archaeology's most spectacular discovery. King Antiochus I of Commagene, ruling this buffer kingdom between Rome and Parthia from 69-34 BCE, conceived a monument so audacious it staggers imagination—a funerary complex where he declared himself equal to gods.

The final 600-metre (1,969-foot) summit climb requires 20 minutes of steady hiking, building anticipation for the revelation awaiting us. Cresting the ridge, the Western Terrace reveals Antiochus's achievement: colossal seated statues in semi-circle, their 2-metre (6.5-foot) heads representing syncretic gods—Helios-Mithra, Fortuna, Zeus-Ahuramazda, Antiochus himself, and Hercules. The Eastern Terrace, better preserved and more dramatic, displays these divine figures in original majesty. Between them lies the 50-metre (164-foot) artificial tumulus of crushed stone concealing Antiochus's unexcavated tomb. The king left detailed inscriptions explaining his divine status and specifying elaborate rituals celebrating his birth and coronation for eternity. Relief panels show Antiochus's divine partnerships, while the lion horoscope relief records the precise astrological moment—July 7, 62 BCE—when planets aligned to herald a god-king's arrival.

Descending from Nemrut, we follow the Commagene trail further into this remarkable kingdom. At Yeni Kale, a medieval castle commands the ridge above the Kahta valley — a dramatic exterior stop that speaks to the strategic importance of these mountain approaches across every era of history.

We continue to the Cendere Bridge, one of the finest surviving Roman bridges in the world, built around 200 CE during the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus. Four commemorative columns once flanked its approaches — dedicated to Severus, his wife Julia Domna, and his two sons. One column is conspicuously absent: the column honouring his son Geta was torn down after his brother Caracalla had him murdered and ordered his memory erased from history. The bridge itself has carried traffic across the Kahta river for nearly two thousand years.

Our final stop is Karakus Tumulus — a Commagene royal burial mound rising from a hilltop and marked by columns topped with carved eagles and animals. Its name means Black Bird, after the eagle that crowns it. A quieter, less visited monument than Nemrut but part of the same dynastic story — the Commagene kings who dared to claim kinship with both Zeus and the gods of Persia, and built their monuments accordingly.

Overnight in Adiyaman.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Adiyaman - Sanliurfa (Urfa) & Gobeklitepe

This morning we arrive in Sanliurfa, known simply as Urfa, one of humanity's most ancient continuously inhabited cities — a place sacred to three Abrahamic faiths and, according to tradition, the birthplace of the prophet Abraham himself.

We begin in the heart of the old city, where the Pool of Abraham (Balklgol) and its surrounding complex of mosques and madrasas create an atmosphere of timeless devotion. Sacred carp glide through waters that believers hold miraculous, and locals come for morning prayers as they have for centuries. We wander the adjacent bazaar streets of Golbasi — narrow lanes of spice merchants, coppersmiths and textile sellers — before breaking for lunch at a local restaurant, sampling the distinctive cuisine of this ancient crossroads city.

Our afternoon carries us fifteen kilometres north to Göbeklitepe, the site that transformed our understanding of human social organization. Discovered in 1995, this 11,500-year-old temple complex predates Stonehenge by 6,000 years and the Egyptian pyramids by 7,000 years. Walking among the circular stone enclosures with their massive T-shaped pillars carved with animals and abstract symbols, we confront a revolutionary truth: organized religion and monumental architecture emerged before agriculture, not after. Hunter-gatherer peoples constructed this vast ceremonial complex, suggesting that spiritual and social needs drove civilization's development. The precision of megalithic construction and sophisticated carved reliefs challenge previous assumptions about prehistoric societies.

As evening approaches we travel south to Harran, the ancient city mentioned in Genesis where Abraham paused on his journey from Ur to Canaan. Harran's distinctive beehive houses -- constructed using techniques unchanged for millennia -- create an otherworldly landscape unlike anywhere else on earth. We take dinner here near these extraordinary mud-brick domes before returning along the road to Urfa and our hotel.

Overnight in Urfa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Urfa Touring - Fly to Istanbul

Our final morning in southeastern Anatolia begins at the Sanliurfa Archaeology Museum, one of Turkiye's most impressive modern cultural institutions. Here we explore Göbeklitepe's broader context through exceptional artifacts and displays — life-sized reconstructions help us visualize ancient ceremonies, while the comprehensive collection traces the region's continuous inhabitation from the Stone Age through successive empires. The museum alone justifies the journey to Urfa.

We continue to the Urfa Mosaic Museum, housed in a beautifully restored old market building in the heart of the city. The remarkable Amazons Mosaic and an exceptional collection of Roman and Byzantine treasures discovered throughout the region offer a final reminder of the extraordinary civilisational depth of this corner of Anatolia — Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic layers compressed into one city, one morning.

This afternoon we transfer to Urfa's airport for our flight to Istanbul, carrying us from civilization's ancient birthplace to the city that has bridged East and West for two millennia. Landing in Istanbul, minarets and domes punctuating the skyline welcome us like old friends after our journey through Anatolia's heartlands — from Hittite plateau to Black Sea coast, from Armenian highlands to Mesopotamian plain.

Overnight in Istanbul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 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. Recep Tayyip Erdogan made the controversial decision to convert the building back into a mosque, though it remains opens 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 kean 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 13 Istanbul Touring Continued

Our morning starts with a visit to the aromatic Spice Bazaar, where the smells of cinnamon, clove, and thyme rise from hundreds of colourful muslin bags at every store front. Nearby we'll visit the Mosque of Suleyman the Magnificent, built by the great architect Sinan in the 16th century. The design of the mosque achieves a perfection of harmony and monumentality at once, set in the centre of a huge complex which included a library, soup kitchen for the poor, a hammam (bath), fountains, gardens, caravansary, and schools.

We then board a ferry for a relaxing cruise along the shores of the legendary Bosphorus, the natural gateway that divides Asia and Europe. As you sit back and enjoy some tea from traditional small cups, numerous summer palaces and palatial homes will pass by on either side.

Disembarking at the northern end of the strait, we have a break for lunch (a local fish restaurant is recommended) before we proceed to the Kariye (Chora) Museum to see the marvelous mosaics of the late Byzantine period. We then make our way back to our hotel with some free time before our evening meal.

Overnight in Istanbul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Departure

Departure from Istanbul.

IYI YOLCULUKLAR/BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast