

## EASTERN & WESTERN TURKEY

**27 days**

Created on: 13 Apr, 2026

### 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 - 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 was 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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

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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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

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Overnight in Mardin.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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 Erzurum'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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 16 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

### Day 17 Istanbul - Gallipoli - Troy - Canakkale

This morning we bid farewell to Europe, driving along the Sea of Marmara through Thrace---the small European corner of a nation that is 97% Asian. Turkey's fascinating character springs from the countless peoples who have claimed this bridge between continents as home.

Before leaving Europe, we visit Gallipoli---Gelibolu in Turkish. This narrow, mountainous peninsula has witnessed over 3,000 years of battles for control of the Dardanelles. Here, during World War I, a young officer named Mustafa Kemal first showed the brilliance that would transform him into Atatürk, father of the Turkish Republic. Winston Churchill's ambitious plan to capture these straits, open the way to Russia, and seize Constantinople failed catastrophically. Today, over 30 memorials mark this hallowed ground where Australian, New Zealand, British, French, and Turkish soldiers fought with extraordinary courage.

Crossing the Dardanelles by ferry, we leave Europe for Asia and journey to Troy, where legend claims Greek and Trojan heroes fought for beautiful Helen. For centuries, scholars dismissed Homer's Iliad as pure myth until German businessman Heinrich Schliemann excavated here at his own expense in the 1870s. His discoveries proved that a sophisticated city had indeed flourished on this strategic hilltop for millennia.

Standing on Troy's ancient ramparts, we gaze across the windswept plain where archaeology and epic poetry merge into one timeless story. The famous north wind still blows from the Dardanelles, just as Homer described 3,000 years ago. We arrive in Canakkale in time for dinner.

Overnight in Canakkale.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 18 Canakkale - Pergamon - Kusadasi

An early start carries us down Turkey's rugged Aegean coast to the authentically Turkish town of Bergama, ancient Pergamon. Here we explore one of antiquity's greatest medical centres---the Asklepion, considered among the world's first hospitals. Ancient patients came here seeking healing through a combination of medicine, psychology, and faith.

We discover the carved symbol of two serpents wrapped around a cup---the caduceus that still represents medicine today. In Pergamon's theatre, mentally disturbed patients allegedly acted out their emotions as a form of therapy, foreshadowing modern psychoanalysis by 2,000 years. The innovation of ancient physicians who understood the connection between mind and body feels remarkably contemporary.

Our route continues through Izmir, Turkey's most vital port city, birthplace of the legendary blind poet Homer. Here in 1922, during Turkey's War of Independence, Atatürk's forces expelled Greek invading armies, securing the new Turkish Republic's sovereignty. The dramatic events of that war transformed the ancient city of Smyrna into modern Izmir.

We arrive in Kusadasi as evening approaches---the "Island of Birds"---named for the small fortress island connected to the mainland. This beautiful port has welcomed traders, pilgrims, and travellers for centuries. Tonight we rest beside the Aegean Sea, preparing for tomorrow's encounter with one of antiquity's greatest cities.

Overnight in Kusadasi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 19 Kusadasi: Ephesus Site Tour

Today we step into one of the ancient world's greatest cities---Ephesus, crown jewel of Roman Asia Minor. During its golden age, over 250,000 people lived here, making it the empire's third-largest city after Rome and Alexandria. The patron goddess Artemis watched over this cosmopolitan metropolis from her temple, considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Walking down the marble-paved Arcadian Way, we follow the same path where St. Paul preached, Mark Antony paraded, and wealthy merchants displayed their prosperity. The Library of Celsus rises before us in restored magnificence---once holding 12,000 scrolls, it served as both library and elaborate tomb for the Roman consul whose son built it in his honour.

The Great Theatre, carved into the hillside, could hold 24,000 spectators for gladiator contests and dramatic performances. From its upper tiers, we gaze across the former harbour where Mediterranean ships once docked. Centuries of river silt have moved the coastline 8

kilometres away, leaving this great port city stranded inland---nature's reminder that even mighty Rome couldn't control everything.

Our special visit to the Terrace Houses reveals how Ephesus's elite lived. These Roman villas, protected under modern roofs, preserve incredible frescoes, mosaics, and marble decorations. Walking through their rooms, we glimpse the sophisticated lifestyle that made Ephesus famous throughout the ancient world.

The superb Ephesus Museum houses treasures that bring the ancient city to life, while nearby Selcuk shows us Turkey's medieval Islamic heritage with the beautiful sa Bey Mosque, built in 1375, and the imposing Ayasoluk Fortress crowning the hill.

Overnight in Kusadasi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

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

Winding roads carry us southward along the Aegean coast through landscapes of olive groves and pine forests. En route, we pause at Didyma, one of antiquity's most powerful oracles. For over a thousand years, pilgrims journeyed here seeking Apollo's wisdom through prophecies delivered by the sacred priestess.

The Temple of Apollo at Didyma was the fourth-largest temple in the Greek world, its massive columns reaching towards the heavens in tribute to the sun god. Standing among these ancient stones, we understand why Greeks believed this was a place where mortals could communicate with the divine.

Our destination, Bodrum, occupies one of the Mediterranean's most perfect natural harbours. This was ancient Halicarnassus, birthplace of Herodotus, the world's first historian, and site of another Wonder of the Ancient World---the Mausoleum. This elaborate tomb was so magnificent that all grand tombs since have been called mausoleums in its honour.

Modern Bodrum charms visitors with its whitewashed cube houses draped in brilliant bougainvillea, cascading down hillsides to the sparkling sea. The reputation of Bodrum's shipbuilders stretches back to ancient times. Today's craftsmen still construct traditional wooden yachts: the sharp-prowed Tirhandil and the broad-beamed Gulets used for pleasure cruising.

This afternoon we explore the magnificent Crusader Castle of St. Peter, built by the Knights Hospitaller in the early 15th century using stones from the ancient Mausoleum. The castle now houses an extraordinary underwater archaeology museum, displaying treasures from ancient shipwrecks discovered off Turkey's coast by teams from Texas A&M University.

Overnight in Bodrum.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 21 Bodrum: Day at Leisure

Today belongs to you in this enchanting seaside town where ancient history meets modern pleasure. The morning might find you exploring the remains of the Bodrum Mausoleum, where enough foundations survive to imagine King Mausolus's magnificent tomb rising 50 metres above the surrounding city. Though earthquakes and medieval builders have claimed most of the structure, the site's gardens and remaining sculptures still evoke the wonder that made this one of antiquity's seven marvels.

The hillside Bodrum Amphitheatre offers another glimpse of ancient Halicarnassus. Built during King Mausolus's reign in the 4th century BC and later expanded by the Romans, this well-preserved theatre commands stunning views across the modern city to the azure sea beyond. Sitting on its stone seats, you can imagine audiences 2,400 years ago watching Greek tragedies and Roman spectacles.

Bodrum's narrow streets invite wandering, with traditional Turkish houses, boutique shops, and waterfront cafés creating a perfect atmosphere for relaxation. The harbour bustles with wooden gulets preparing for sunset cruises, their varnished hulls gleaming in the Mediterranean sun.

Perhaps you'll choose to stroll the castle ramparts again, watching fishing boats return with their daily catch, or simply find a seaside taverna to sample fresh seafood while contemplating how this beautiful bay has sheltered sailors and dreamers for thousands of years.

Overnight in Bodrum.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 22 Bodrum - Kas

Leaving Bodrum's azure embrace, we journey over the coastal fringes of the mighty Taurus Mountains towards the warm Mediterranean shore, famously called the "Turquoise Coast" for its extraordinarily blue waters. This dramatic landscape transition takes us from Aegean sophistication to Mediterranean wildness.

The picturesque fishing village of Kas welcomes us with its intimate harbour surrounded by mountains that plunge directly into crystal-clear seas. Lycian tombs carved into cliffsides 2,000 years ago watch over the town, while an ancient theatre carved from living rock speaks of Kas's importance during classical times. The Greek island of Kastellorizo floats just offshore, so close you feel you could swim to it.

Known throughout Turkey for its stunning natural beauty and relaxed atmosphere, Kas has evolved from a quiet fishing village into a haven for those seeking authentic Mediterranean life. The town maintains its traditional character despite its popularity, with narrow streets climbing hillsides adorned with brilliant bougainvillea and traditional Turkish houses painted in white and blue.

Local fishermen still bring their catch to the small harbour each morning, just as their ancestors did when this was the Lycian city of Antiphellos. The ancient name means "opposite Phellos," referring to the Lycian city across the bay whose ruins still crown a nearby hilltop.

Tonight we rest in this magical corner of Turkey where mountains meet the sea and ancient stones blend seamlessly with modern life.

Overnight in Kas.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 23 Kas & Gulet Cruise

This morning we board a traditional Turkish gulet, a handcrafted wooden vessel created by master shipbuilders whose skills pass from generation to generation. These beautiful boats originated in the Bodrum region, where craftsmen still shape each hull by hand, following designs perfected over centuries of Mediterranean sailing.

Our open-ended itinerary adapts to local weather and sea conditions, but we anticipate cruising to some of the coast's most spectacular treasures. Tersane Bay offers a perfect swimming stop in waters so clear you can see ancient pottery shards on the seabed 10 metres below. At Kekova, we sail over the submerged ruins of an ancient city destroyed by earthquakes in the 2nd century AD.

The fortress at Simena, accessible only by boat or mountain path, crowns a rocky peninsula where Byzantine walls still guard empty windows looking across the sea. Swimming near these ruins, we glimpse foundations of houses and rock-hewn staircases beneath the crystal-clear surface--an underwater museum preserved by the Mediterranean's warm, salty embrace.

Our captain guides us to hidden coves known only to local sailors, where pine forests cascade to secluded beaches and the only sounds are gentle waves against ancient stones. We anchor for swimming in waters that shift from deep sapphire to brilliant turquoise, understanding perfectly why this coast bears that jewel's name.

Overnight in Kas.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 24 Kas - Phaselis - Antalya

Following the ancient Lycian Coast, we journey to Myra, where extraordinary rock tombs carved directly into towering cliffs reveal the sophisticated artistry of Lycian civilization. These elaborate burial chambers, adorned with intricate facades resembling temple fronts, housed the sarcophagi of wealthy merchants and nobles who controlled this coastline 2,000 years ago.

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At the Church of St. Nicholas, we encounter the historical figure behind the Father Christmas legend. The 4th-century bishop who inspired Santa Claus lived and served in this very community, known for his generosity to children and the poor. Beautiful Byzantine mosaics and frescoes within the church create an intimate connection to this beloved saint's actual life and ministry.

Before reaching Antalya, we explore Phaselis, one of the Mediterranean's most spectacular Roman sites. Built on a narrow peninsula between pine-covered mountains and three natural harbours, this ancient city perfectly demonstrates Roman mastery of coastal geography. Founded in the 7th century BC, Phaselis prospered as a member of the Lycian League, its merchants trading with civilizations across the Mediterranean.

Walking through Phaselis's well-preserved ruins, we discover a theatre overlooking the sea, a gymnasium where Roman citizens maintained their fitness, and a necropolis where elaborate tombs reflect the city's cosmopolitan wealth. The three harbours that made Phaselis famous still shelter modern yachts, their protected waters as valuable today as they were 2,000 years ago.

Overnight in Antalya.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 25 Antalya: Perge & Aspendos

Today we delve into Roman imperial grandeur at Perge, believed to be the birthplace of St. Paul and one of Asia Minor's most impressive archaeological sites. This ancient city offers an extraordinary window into Roman life at its most sophisticated, when the empire's eastern provinces rivalled Rome itself for wealth and culture.

Perge's massive theatre, adorned with intricate marble reliefs, demonstrates Roman engineering prowess and artistic refinement. The theatre's 15,000-seat capacity reflects the city's importance, while its superb acoustics prove that Roman architects understood sound as well as structure. Nearby, we explore a luxurious colonnaded steam bath complex and an imposing basilica that served both commercial and judicial functions.

Our visit to nearby Aspendos reveals perhaps the world's best-preserved Roman theatre, a masterpiece of engineering that still hosts performances 1,800 years after its construction. Standing in this magnificent structure, we experience acoustic perfection---even whispers from the stage reach the highest seats with crystal clarity. The Romans' mastery of mathematical principles and architectural innovation created a building that remains functionally superior to many modern venues.

The intricate aqueduct system that supplied Perge with fresh mountain water demonstrates Roman mastery of hydraulic engineering. These stone channels carried water across valleys and through mountains, providing essential services that supported urban populations larger than many modern cities.

We conclude our day at Antalya's excellent archaeological museum, which houses early Christian icons and Roman sculptures representing some of Asia Minor's finest artistic achievements.

Overnight in Antalya.

Included Meal(s): 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.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

**Day 27 Departure**

Departure from Istanbul.

IYI YOLCULUKLAR/BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast