

“ Our guide demonstrated a fund of knowledge about the history and customs of the areas we visited. One member of our party remarked that he thought him the best guide he had ever come across, I would not disagree. ”

Sir Harold and Lady Walker, Eastern Turkey

# Turkish delights



Two great empires, the Ottoman and the Byzantine, are at the heart of Turkey's rich inheritance. Its amazing confluence of cultures offers visitors the very best of all worlds in terms of history, cultural heritage and thriving towns and cities. Turkish Airlines serves nearly 250 world-wide destinations non-stop from Istanbul's Ataturk Airport and flights are good value, so Istanbul makes for a great stop over.

Bestriding the divide where East meets West, Istanbul is an extravaganza of splendid mosques and opulent palaces, historical and contemporary museums, a bustling port, bazaars, invigorating hamams and fabulous food. Further afield remarkable experiences await, such as Cappadocia's underground cities, the moving history of Gallipoli, the ancient marvels at Ephesus and Troy and the geological phenomena of Pamukkale and Goreme.



TOP: Statues at the summit of Mount Nemrut, south eastern Turkey, believed to be the site of a royal tomb from the 1st century BC.

MIDDLE LEFT: Bodrum Harbour and the distinctive Castle of St Peter, built by the Knights of St John from 1402 onwards.

MIDDLE RIGHT: With nearly 4,000 shops, Istanbul's Grand Bazaar is the largest souk in the world.

ABOVE: The Sultan Ahmed Mosque (known as the Blue Mosque) incorporates Byzantine Christian and Islamic elements.

» sample itineraries «

## Istanbul to Cappadocia

Mosques, palaces and cities – ancient and modern | 9 days

This itinerary showcases some of Turkey's most precious jewels. In Istanbul you'll visit the Blue Mosque, the lavish Topkapi Palace and the awe-inspiring Hagia Sophia, haggle with vendors in the Grand Bazaar and cruise on the Bosphorus. There'll be plenty of time to explore on your own too. Enjoy lush parks and waterside mansions, treat your taste buds to local specialties, and relax at the end of a busy day in a traditional hamam. Other stand-out attractions include the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Troy, the ancient city of Kusadasi and breathtaking Pamukkale as well as Cappadocia's 13th Century Sultanhan Caravanserai, one of the Seljuk architectural masterpieces.

» guide price « £2,395 per person

## Travels in Eastern Turkey

From Istanbul to Anatolia's far east | 14 days

Many civilisations settled in Eastern Turkey, including Romans, Persians and Armenians, each leaving their mark. Explore their legacy on this tour which starts in the east at Lake Van and takes you through the breathtaking landscape of the little-known eastern Anatolian heartlands. You'll visit some of this area's greatest historic sites, including the magnificent Ottoman palace of Ishak Pasha, the medieval ruined city of Ani, Seljuk and Mongolian monuments at Erzurum and the Museum of Anatolian Civilisations in Ankara.

» guide price « £3,625 per person

## The grand tour

Turkey's cultural, historic and natural wonders | 13 days

Istanbul, Pamukkale and Cappadocia and the monuments of Troy and Ephesus are just the beginning of this in-depth journey which takes you from the Byzantine highlights of former Constantinople to central Anatolia and back. Gallipoli, Ephesus, Pamukkale, Cappadocia and the Goreme National Park, Ankara and Bursa will all stir and inspire.

» guide price « £3,110 per person

## Other suggestions

Bodrum gulets - luxury yacht cruising | 8 days

**TOP TIP:** The dark and extraordinary Basilica Cistern is a marvellously cooling and calming experience, particularly at the hottest time of the day. Beware the slippery floor and steps – I suggest sensible footwear!

**DID YOU KNOW:** Begun in 532 AD, it took 10,000 people nearly six years to build Hagia Sophia cathedral. It has also been a mosque and is now a museum.

**BEST TIME TO GO:** Mid March to mid November.





*Souqs, spices, mosques and minarets:*  
Fiona and family in Istanbul



## FAR FRONTIERS TRAVEL TIME OUT IN TURKEY

“ My neck was aching – craning upwards to take in the extraordinary dazzling sight above.

The Golden Domes of Hagia Santa Sophia towered over me – stained glass shot through with purple and red, golden angels staring out from their lofty roosts, giant Arabic scripts from a bygone era when the Sophia was a place of worship. Monumental doors towered over small boys and cool marble floors stretched out before us.

It's December 2015 and I've brought my husband and sons aged 10 and 12 to Istanbul for a short city break en-route to the Middle East for a family holiday. We're all extremely impressed with Turkish Airlines' excellent food, friendly staff and a choice of films that would satisfy even the most ardent movie-goer. Being the airline's hub and less than four hours' flight from London, Istanbul is perfectly placed for a two or three day stopover en-route to your final destination.

I loved the city's Basilica Cistern, the dimly-lit underground home to hundreds of catfish – swimming alongside giant stone medusas, sitting in their watery graves. Ornate carved pillars support the roof of this gargantuan tank, the water supply for the whole city, with enough to last two years or more in the event of a siege.



My elder son was mesmerized by the Blue Mosque – so called because of its richly tiled blue and white interior. He marvelled at the myriad of chandelier lamps dominating the prayer hall and the biggest carpet you've ever seen.

Out for supper and the kebabs were sizzling, the flatbreads puffed up with heat fresh from the oven and the waiters smiling and cheeky with the children, asking their favourite football team and attentively suggesting possible delicacies they might enjoy.

The streets bustled with shoppers as the sun slid over the horizon and the call to prayer echoed over the city – the cacophony of incantations, timbres and timing of the muezzins melding into one continuous harmony. Crossing the street from our hotel, we pushed through the crowds and merged with the gentle stream of evening bargain hunters. Spice stalls, Turkish delight, bracelets, lanterns and household goods rubbed shoulders with loafahs, leatherware, trinkets and flowing scarves. Inevitably I let myself be drawn into the obligatory carpet shop. If truth be told, I love the process and have always believed that half the enjoyment of a carpet in your sitting room is the memory of its purchase! The boys giggled at this age-old process – tradition intertwined with economy as we halved the original price, then halved it again, until the amount was settled and the carpet folded into its perfect brown paper package.

Our second day took us onto the Bosphorus, the mighty river that separates the Asian and European sides of Istanbul. At its height, the former Byzantine capital of the great Ottoman Empire spanned 57 countries and dominated vast swathes of the region for over 600 years. The river itself is some 31km long and stretches over 3km at its widest point. Its banks

revealed a vast array of wealth: Decadent villas owned by some of the richest families in Turkey, vast ducal waterfront edifices built in the style of neo-Georgian palaces of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Military Academy which dominates a large section of shoreline and ancient wooden town houses. Seagulls squabbled in our wake and, looking down, we spotted a host of jellyfish in the churning waters.

As the sun began to set over the city for the second time, we hurried to the Topkapi Palace, the opulent court of the last sultans of this great empire.

Richly jewelled daggers (khanjars), golden boxes overflowing with emeralds (like something out of an Ali Baba extravaganza) and gilded cups and bracelets jostled for the limelight, which was stolen by the most enormous diamond I have ever seen. The boys remarked that our very own crown jewels (which we've recently seen in London) paled into insignificance by comparison.

Incongruously the sultans had a fantastic collection of European clocks - strangely refined items when set against a backdrop of military might. Golden armour for their horses, bejewelled chain mail for ceremonial entry of newly-seized capitals, and numerous swords, bows, arrows, hatchets and knives.

We bade farewell to our superlative guide and friend Taner - quite honestly one of the best I have had anywhere in the world - promising to return for a longer stay. My husband, fascinated by military history and legends, to the ancient city of Troy, the boys to the legendary cave dwellings of Cappadocia and, for me, to the battlefields of Gallipoli and the Turquoise Aegean Coast – Turkey offers so much for everyone.

See the website for the full version of Fiona's report and more photographs!



The air holiday packages included here are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 9270. Please see our booking conditions for more information.

