

TURKISH ODYSSEY

DAY 1: ARRIVE ISTANBUL

Our tour commences this evening in the vibrant city of Istanbul with its' backdrop of minarets and domes. After our welcome meeting there is the opportunity to sample Turkey's famous Ottoman fare.

DAY 2: ISTANBUL

This city is a treasure trove filled with attractions to discover. Today, a city tour taking in the Blue Mosque with its six minarets, cascading domes and blue-tiled interior. After lunch the imposing Topkapi Palace, seat of the Ottoman Empire for centuries with impressive views over the Bosphorus.

DAY 3: ISTANBUL

With so much to see in Istanbul we are going to spend another full day exploring this fascinating city. We'll start with a visit to Aya Sofia, Byzantium's magnificent dedication to the new religion of the empire. Though originally built as a Basilica, it was later converted to a mosque and is now a museum – the perfect mixture of Ottoman and Byzantine culture under a single cupola. After lunch we'll visit Dolmabahce Palace, home to the last five Sultans of the Ottoman Empire and an homage to European architecture.

DAY 4: ISTANBUL - BURSA

An early start this morning as we catch our high speed ferry across the sea of Marmara to the original capital of the Ottoman Empire, Bursa. Nicknamed the 'Green City', Bursa lives up to its' name with parks and gardens at every turn. After our morning walking tour, why not shop for silk scarves in the beautiful old silk market before enjoying a traditional Turkish bath at the healing thermal springs. This evening we'll feast on a delicious local specialty - Iskender Kebap, before having the privilege of watching a Whirling Dervish ceremony at a local Dervish lodge.

DAY 5: BURSA - GALLIPOLI - CANAKKALE

As memorable to Turks as it is to Australians, Gallipoli saw the birth of two nations emerge from the ashes of World War 1. An emotional afternoon as we tour the battlefields of the Gallipoli Peninsula.

DAY 6: CANAKKALE - TROY - PERGAMON - SELCUK

Making our way down the coast today our first stop is the ancient city of Troy. Originally made famous in Homer's 'Iliad' and immortalized on film by Brad Pitt, the site of Troy dates back over 5000 years. Later we catch our first glimpse of the Aegean before stopping in the resort town of Ayvalik for lunch. This afternoon we will visit the ruins of Pergamon with one of the steepest theatres in the region. Overnight Selcuk.

DAY 7: SIRINCE - EPHEBUS - SELCUK

Offering some of the finest ruins in the Mediterranean, Ephesus needs no introduction. Before visiting this wonderful city there's the opportunity for some local wine tasting and a delicious lunch in the once-Greek village of Sirince.

DAY 8: SELCUK - PAMUKKALE - FETHIYE

A visit today to the gleaming white travertine terraces of Pamukkale. This natural phenomena formed by the calcium-rich cascading waters of the thermal springs is a truly spectacular sight! There is also the opportunity to visit the ancient necropolis of Heiropolis. After lunch we will drive to the costal town of Fethiye where we will enjoy a fresh feast at the local fish markets.

DAY 9: FETHIYE

This morning we will make our way to the eerily abandoned village of Kayakoy once home to part of Turkey's sizeable Greek population but is now little more than a 'ghost village'. This picturesque town was abandoned during the population exchange between Greece and Turkey during the 1920's. With restaurants overhanging the gushing stream we'll have lunch at the magnificent Saklikent Gorge and the option to walk through the gorge. Saklikent is the perfect way to while away an afternoon.

DAY 10-12: GULET

The start of our 'holiday' within a holiday, this morning we will board our Gulet – a traditional Turkish sailboat. This will be our home for the next three nights as we spend our days relaxing and enjoying the beautiful waters of the Turkish Mediterranean.

DAY 13: gulet - ANTALYA

We disembark our gulet mid-morning and make our way along the stunning Mediterranean coastline to Antalya. Often described as the Turkish Riviera Antalya is a vibrant city with a charming old quarter, its winding streets filled with stalls and boutiques and hidden restaurants with some of the most stunning views of the Med.

DAY 14: ANTALYA

If you really feel the need to stretch your legs after all that R&R on our gulet, you'll relish the opportunity to visit Termessos, an ancient Greek city with, in our opinion, the most spectacular ancient theatre in the region. This afternoon sit back and soak up our last views over the Mediterranean before we head inland tomorrow to the plains of Central Anatolia.

DAY 15: ANTALYA – CAPPADOCIA

A full day on the bus today as we make our way from the coast through the Taurus mountains and across the plains of Central Anatolia. With scenery this stunning you certainly won't be bored! This afternoon we will visit Sultanhanı Caravanserai one of the stops on the old Silk Road, before arriving into the delightful town of Ortahisar, right in the heart of Cappadocia. Ortahisar is a traditional village with only a small number of very special boutique hotels. Whilst some villages in the region have, unfortunately, surrendered completely to tourism, Ortahisar is an authentic gem right in the heart of this spectacular region.

DAY 16: CAPPADOCIA

The option this morning is to start your day with the best view in town – in a hot air balloon drifting over the surreal lunar landscape of Cappadocia! After breakfast we will head to one of Cappadocia's underground cities which was originally constructed by the Hittites but subsequently used by Christians who were being persecuted by the Romans. From here we'll visit Soganli, a little-visited open air museum with an impressive collection of churches carved out of the soft volcanic rock. This evening perhaps enjoy the chance to sample a local specialty – testi kebab – slow cooked meat or vegetables baked in a clay pot.

DAY 17: CAPPADOCIA

Our second full day in Cappadocia, today we will find out more about Turkey's most famous pieces of art: their carpets! This is an excellent opportunity to learn a little bit more about what's under your feet from an expert who has been collecting pieces for more than 25 years. Free time for lunch and perhaps, if you're keen, an optional visit to Goreme's Open Air Museum with its astounding churches covered in beautiful frescoes. This afternoon we have a unique opportunity to explore the surrounding valleys full of marshmallow rock formations and fairy chimneys either on foot or, for the more adventurous, via horseback before finishing our time in Cappadocia with sunset views and some of the most delicious, home-cooked fare you'll taste all trip!

DAY 18: CAPPADOCIA- SAFRANBOLU

Today we bid goodbye to Ortahisar and its fairy chimneys and head towards the Black Sea region and the 19th century town of Safranbolu. This evening there's the chance to sample delicious lokum (Turkish Delight) as we wander the cobbled streets of this charming town before we head back to the converted Ottoman Mansion that is our home for the next two nights.

DAY 19: SAFRANBOLU

Located in a valley, the UNESCO Heritage Listed town of Safranbolu is truly a hidden gem. The old town itself is full of 19th century Ottoman mansions, several of which have been maintained to give us a glimpse of life during that time. It is also one of the best places on the trip to do your souvenir shopping as the narrow streets are lined with vendors selling everything from wooden puzzles to handmade shoes!

DAY 20: SAFRANBOLU - ISTANBUL

A late breakfast this morning before our drive back to arguably the most beautiful city in the world, Istanbul. Tonight we enjoy a banquet fit for an Ottoman Sultan.

DAY 21: ISTANBUL

Today we say farewell to new friends as our tour concludes after breakfast.