

# EASTERN TURKEY SNAPSHOT

## TOUR DETAILS

Duration  
9 days

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit the world's first temple, Göbekli Tepe
- Experience a sunrise at Mount Nemrut
- Spiritual Urfa and dramatic Mardin
- Discover mud beehive homes in ancient Harran
- Climb the walls of Diyarbakir
- Take a boat to stunning Rumkale
- Taste Gaziantep's culinary delights
- Visit the Armenian church on Akdamar island in Lake Van

Off The Beaten Track Rating ●●●●●

Activity Rating ★★ ★

## ITINERARY

**DAY 1** Fly into Istanbul airport where a Travel The Unknown representative will meet you and take you to your hotel. The rest of the day is free to relax or explore. Overnight in Istanbul. Meal plan: n/a

**DAY 2** Fly from Istanbul to Gaziantep. Take a walking tour of Gaziantep including its Kale (fortress), colourful markets and its famous mosaic museum. Overnight in Gaziantep. Meal plan: L, D

*The culinary capital of East Turkey, **Gaziantep's** famous baklava (pistachio pastries), are shipped all over the country and beyond. Its renowned restaurants serve up mouth-watering dishes that will satisfy any palate. Besides cuisine, Gaziantep boasts a fine fortress, one of the best mosaics museums in the world and some fascinating markets.*

**DAY 3** Drive to the old town of Halfeti. Here change wheels for a small boat and approach Rumkale by boat through a stunning gorge. This gorgeous boat ride will take you past the enormous fort of Rumkale and some beautiful villages. Take a short detour to the historical site of Zeugma. Drive to Urfa for a short tour of the city's historical sights. Optional evening event with local music often performed with Ottoman era instruments, and local culinary specialities (at additional cost, approx. €30, payable locally). Overnight in a comfortable hotel in Urfa. Meal plan: B, L

***Rumkale** means "Roman Fortress" in Turkish. The present structure is largely Hellenistic and Roman in origin, though its strategic location had been recognised by the Assyrians. The site was occupied by various Byzantine and Armenian warlords during the Middle Ages, and by the Mamluks in 1293. Today the site is only accessible by boat.*

***Zeugma** was an important trading centre in the Hellenistic Era, whose importance grew steadily under Roman rule. Artistic and cultural development progressed in parallel to that of its trade and commerce. When the site was excavated it turned up a number of beautiful mosaics, including the famous Gypsy girl mosaic now on display in the mosaics museum in Gaziantep alongside many others from Zeugma.*

***Urfa** (a.k.a. Şanlıurfa, "the prophet's city", or Edessa in ancient times) is the most spiritual city in East Turkey. It is a major centre for pilgrimage and its traditions are very much alive and well. The "Şanlı-" part of its name (meaning "great" or "dignified") was awarded by the Turkish legislature in 1984 in recognition of the city's pivotal role in the Turkish war of Independence. Of particular note for visitors are Urfa castle (the current walls were constructed by the Abbasids in 814AD), the Pool of Sacred Fish where Abraham was thrown into the fire by Nimrod, the park of mosques, the market area and Urfa museum.*

**DAY 4** After breakfast visit the unique archaeological site of Göbekli Tepe. Take time to visit the site and learn about its incredible history. Continue to the museum in Urfa which houses many artefacts found at Göbekli Tepe including the oldest life-size human statue in the world. Have lunch then drive to Harran and discover its ancient Islamic university, its fortress and its charming beehive houses. Have tea in a comfortable beehive mud hut. Then drive to Kahta. Overnight in a comfortable hotel in Kahta. Meal plan: B, L

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**Göbekli Tepe, the oldest place of worship in the world**, is an archaeological site without equal. Prior to its discovery in 1994 and its subsequent excavation it was widely believed by anthropologists that religion evolved as a result of living in larger communities which was itself the result of the change from foraging to agriculture. However Göbekli Tepe has **turned our theories of our own evolution on their head**. The vast religious site dates from the hunter gatherer period and there is no evidence of any agriculture or even human habitation suggesting that it may have been the emergence of religion that lead us to civilisation and thus to agriculture. It is hard to overestimate the significance of this finding.

The site contains a vast array of circular structures and huge pillars, some with beautiful limestone carvings of lions, foxes, snakes and birds, believed to be gatekeepers of the entrance to the next world. To date less than ten percent of the site has been excavated. You can read an article about this fascinating site in National Geographic magazine published in June 2011 here:

<http://nqm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/06/gobekli-tepe/mann-text/1>

Mentioned in the book of Genesis, **Harran** is believed to have once been home to the Prophet Abraham. The site of the first Islamic university in Anatolia, Harran also boasts the remains of an 8th century mosque, a citadel and some 300 year old beehive mud homes.

**DAY 5** Very early start to visit the incredible statues of animals and giant heads at the summit of Mount Nemrut for sunrise. Visit the historical Roman Cendere Bridge on the way back to the hotel. Breakfast and a rest before a midday checkout. After checkout drive to Diyarbakir. Take a short tour of Diyarbakir's historic centre including its marketplace, and take in the sunset on city's famous walls, the world's largest wall after China's Great Wall. Overnight in a hotel in Diyarbakir. Meal plan: B, L

**Mount Nemrut (a.k.a. Nemrut Dağı)** is one of East Turkey's most spell-binding attractions. At the peak of this mountain (at over 2000m) sit enigmatic statues of a pre-Roman king, Antiochus I Theos of Commagene, and the various gods he believed to be his ancestors. The mountain is at its most dramatic at sunrise and the views from the summit are sublime.

**Diyarbakir** (known as "Amed" to the Kurdish majority there) is the largest city in south eastern Turkey and was often the flashpoint for anti-Turkish rebellion in days gone by. Indeed most Turkish Kurds consider it the capital of their would-be nation. Under a less repressive government in Ankara the city today is experiencing a renaissance and is full of soul and character. Its city walls stretch almost 6 kilometres unbroken and inside those walls are a fascinating array of mosques, churches townhouses and an impressive architectural spectrum.

**DAY 6** Take a short walk through Diyarbakir to visit an Armenian church, an Orthodox Syriac church and the Ulu Jamii mosque. Drive to Hasankeyf, a stunning historical site whose fate hangs in the balance. Stop at Mor Gabriel monastery for a short visit. Continue to the beautiful castle town of Mardin for a short visit. Meal plan: B, L

With a history stretching back almost four millennia, and beautiful honey-coloured buildings clinging to a cliffside overlooking the river Tigris, **Hasankeyf** is a beautiful and historic place. It boasts a castle, palaces, mosques and a lovely if crumbling bridge. Its future is precarious however due to the proposed Ilisu dam project which intends to flood the whole valley, displacing its inhabitants and losing forever the treasures and beauty of Hasankeyf. Foreign financial backers have pulled out after the World Monuments Fund listed the village but the Turkish government seem keen to push ahead nonetheless. See it while you can.

**Mor Gabriel monastery** is the oldest surviving Syriac Orthodox monastery in the world. Today it is a working community set amongst gardens and orchards, and is inhabited by around fifteen nuns and two monks, occupying separate wings. The monastery's primary purpose is to keep Syriac Orthodox Christianity alive in the land of its birth by providing schooling and ordination of native-born monks. On occasions in the past it has provided physical protection to the region's Christian population.

**Mardin** is a remarkable town full of beautiful mosques and churches and a setting that will take your breath away. With baked-brown alleyways, honey-coloured buildings, a maze of a market and stunning ancient buildings, you will quickly see why Mardin has become a favourite with Turkish travellers.

**DAY 7** Drive East to Van. Visit Akdamar island in Lake Van en route. We recommend Halay Bar for the evening's entertainment. Live music is on most nights. Overnight in a comfortable hotel in Van. Meal plan: B, L

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**Lake Van**, Turkey's largest lake, is flanked by the snowy peaks of the volcanoes of Mount Suphan and Mount Nemrut. The beautiful azure waters of the lake are highly alkaline and drilling at the bottom of the lake by German palaeontologists has revealed climate data covering almost 15,000 years despite only penetrating the first few metres of sediment. It is believed the sediment may hold climate data from the last 800,000 years!

**Akdamar island** is a small island 3km from the Shore of Lake Van, most famous for the **Armenian Cathedral of the Holy Cross (a.k.a. Akdamar Kilisesi)**. The unique importance of the building comes from the extensive array of bas-relief carvings, of biblical scenes predominantly, that adorn its external walls. Due to the contentious history between Turkey and Armenia the site has been the site of vandalism in the past and its restoration was never short on controversy. But the outcome is spectacular. Besides the marvellous views of the church, the island, the lake and the mountains beyond, there are ruins of an Armenian monastery which once served the church.

**DAY 8** Visit the 17th Century Hoşap castle. This stunning castle is perched on a hilltop and the views from it are beautiful. Drive to Cavuştepe, take a short tour of this 12th Century site before visiting a traditional Kurdish weaving "village" where the famous *Van cats* can usually be found. Return to Van town for lunch. After lunch visit the sprawling site of Van castle. Overnight in comfortable hotel in Van. Meal plan: B, L

**Hoşap Castle** is a large medieval castle in the village of Hoşap (meaning "Good/Sweet Water" in Kurdish) near the border with Iran. It was built by a local Kurdish lord, Mahmudi Suleyman, in 1643. Legend has it that the hands of the architect who built this formidable stronghold were cut off so that he could not build another. Be sure to find its intricately carved lion carvings. A short distance from Hoşap is the Urartian centre **Çavuştepe**. Built in the 8th century B.C., Çavuştepe was once home of the kings of Urartu.

**Van** today is a young vibrant university town but the history of the region goes back more than 7 millennia, and the town itself was the Urartian capital as early as the 9<sup>th</sup> Century BC. **Van Castle**, outside of the modern town, is a vast sprawling Urartian structure dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC that affords excellent views of the beautiful surrounding countryside. Don't miss the perfectly-preserved 5<sup>th</sup> Century trilingual (Old Persian, Babylonian, and Elamite) inscription from Xerxes the Great, the only Achaemenid royal inscription located outside of Iran. The town of Van is also famous throughout Turkey for its kebabs.

**DAY 9** After breakfast transfer to Van airport. Fly to Istanbul (and onwards where applicable). Meal plan: B

## PRICE INCLUDES

Airport pick-up & drop-off  
Internal flights from Istanbul  
Accommodation

Breakfasts and some meals (refer to itinerary for meal plan)  
Ground transport

Drivers and guides  
Climate Care contribution  
Entrance fees to sites on itinerary

## ABOUT OUR TRIPS

In addition to our scheduled group departures, **private and tailor-made trips** can be arranged that include some or all of the places on this itinerary. Please contact us with your requirements (e: [info@traveltheunknown.com](mailto:info@traveltheunknown.com), t: 020 7183 6371) and we will happily put together an itinerary for you and your group. No trip is too long or too short.