ARCHAEOLOGY OF EASTERN TURKEY

11 days
Countries visited
Turkey

Tour Highlights
- Watch the sunset at Mount Nemrut
- Discover the beginnings of civilisation at Göbekli Tepe
- Harran, the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham
- Beautiful ancient architecture and frescoes
- Explore the ancient Zeugma Region
- Explore the vast depths of Cappadocia's underground cities
- Marvel at the world famous “fairy chimneys”
- The unique city of Çatalhöyük
ARCHAEOLOGY OF EASTERN TURKEY

Places visited
Istanbul • Mount Nemrut • Urfa • Harran • Göbekli Tepe • Gaziantep • Zeugma • Ankara • Gordion • Hattusa • Cappadocia • Ozkonak Underground City • Avcilar Valley • Goreme • Konya • Catalhöyük • Holy City of Rumi

What's included
• Internal flights
• Airport pick-up & drop-off
• Ground transport
• Accommodation
• Entrance fees to sites
• Breakfasts
• Drivers and guides

All accommodation subject to availability. Final accommodation choices will be confirmed after booking.
Your Itinerary Map
Your Itinerary Explained

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<th>Place visited</th>
<th>Meals</th>
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<td>B: Breakfast</td>
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The first part of the text in each day is the itinerary schedule and will explain what you will normally see/do during this day of your itinerary.

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The part of the day’s text in italics (and comes after the three dashes “---”) is background information on the places or sites on that day of your itinerary. It is not part of your itinerary and may mention places that will not be visited on your itinerary. If you have any questions please ask us. Travel times where noted are only meant as a guideline.

Tour Itinerary

Day 1 - Istanbul

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.

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Sitting on the Bosphorus, Istanbul is one of the world’s truly great cities - overflowing with culture and historical sites. World class attractions such as the exquisite Hagia Sofia and the Blue Mosque, excellent bars and restaurants, jaw-dropping architecture, vibrant markets and a history of epic proportions makes Istanbul a city par excellence.

Overnight in Turkoman Hotel, Istanbul

Day 2 - Mount Nemrut

Morning flight from Istanbul to Adiyaman. In the afternoon, take a tour of the area including a visit of the Roman-era Cendere Bridge, Karakus Tumulus and Arsemia. Then climb Mount Nemrut, exploring the East and West terraces and in time to watch the sunset from the mountain's peak overlooking the Euphrates valley. Overnight near Mount Nemrut.

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Cendere Bridge is one of the world’s oldest bridges still in use, constructed during the empire of Septimus Severus (193-211). Composed of 92 stones, each weighing around 10 tons, it is thought to be the second largest Roman bridge still in existence, spanning an impressive 122 metres. The bridge today appears as a simple, unadorned arch, but was originally decorated by four Corinthian columns dedicated to Septimus Severus and his wife.
A mountain of around two thousand metres, Mount Nemrut is home to the tomb of the pre-Roman king, Antiochus I Theos of Commagene. Built by the king himself in about 62 BC as a shrine to his own remains, the site consists of two large statues of Antiochus which dwarf two statue pairs of eagles and lions, and various Iranian, Greek and Armenian Gods. The statues are now damaged and mostly appear beheaded. Scholars have largely attributed this to later attacks on iconoclasm, but the statues have since been returned to their original places. Behind the display of statues are some well-preserved slabs of stone which feature figures in relief carving and are originally thought to have formed a large frieze. Archaeologists interpret the figures as Antiochus’ ancestors, which allegedly included Greeks and Persians. It is the perfect place to experience a sunset or sunrise as the views from the summit are sublime.

**NOTE: it is a 20-30 minute walk up uneven steps to reach the summit.**

Arsemia was the summer capital of the Commagene Kingdom and burial place of Mithridates. It is home to the largest rock inscription found in Anatolia, which describes the political and religious beliefs of the inhabitants.

Total travel time : 2 hours
Overnight in Hotel Euphrat, Mount Nemrut

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<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Göbekli Tepe - Urfa - Harran</th>
<th>Meals</th>
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<td><strong>After breakfast, drive to Urfa (113km, 2 hours). First visit Göbekli Tepe then explore the city of Urfa, the Urfa Museum, Balakli Gol and Gumrukhan. In the afternoon visit Harran. Overnight in Urfa.</strong> ---</td>
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**Urfa** (a.k.a. Sanliurfa, “the prophet’s city”, or Edessa in ancient times) is the most spiritual city in Eastern Turkey. It is a major centre for pilgrimage and its traditions are very much alive and well. The “Sanli-” 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 in to the fire by Nimrod, the park of mosques, the market area and the Urfa museum.

Visit the ancient city of Harran, once the centre of Egypt’s Hermetic tradition. See its ominous "Astrological Tower", citadel and local village and take in one of the most atmospheric sites anywhere in the world. 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 which enjoy a constant temperature throughout the year, winter or summer.

The Urfa Museum contains many of the archaeological finds from Göbekli Tepe including steles and sculptures. It also contains Hittite sculptures from Golpinar and pieces from Harran, Nevali Cori and Kabahaydar.
**Balikli Gol**, or ‘The Legendary Pool of Sacred Fish’, is the site where Nimrod threw Abraham into the fire, located within the grounds of the mosque of Rahil-ur-Rahma and surrounded by ornate gardens. Riddled with a mythical enigma, the fish in the pool are said to thrive and a local legend even terms the pool, ‘the doorway to heaven’.

**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.

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. There are striking similarities to sites in Peru, Bolivia and Easter Island that were noted by Robert Schoch in the Megalithomania expedition in November 2012. 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://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/print/2011/06/gobekli-tepe/mann-text](http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/print/2011/06/gobekli-tepe/mann-text)

Total travel time : 4 hours
Overnight in Hilton Garden Inn, Urfa

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### Day 4
**Halfeti - Rumkale - Zeugma - Gaziantep**

Drive to Gaziantep, stopping to see Halfeti and Rumkale and, time permitting, Zeugma. Continue to Gaziantep for overnight.

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A small farming district situated on the East bank of the river Euphrates, **Halfeti** has been a home to the Assyrians (first established by Assyrian King, Shalmaneser I in 885 BC), the Greeks, Romans, the Mameluks and the Ottomans. Despite being sieged by the Mameluks, parts of the old city walls still remain.

**Rumkale** translates to ‘Roman Castle’ and was once a powerful fortress, overlooking the river Euphrates. In ancient times a site of great strategic importance to Romans and Assyrians alike, the fortress is accessible by boat from the neighbouring Zeugma Region. Today, much of the lower-lying town area has been flooded, but the dramatically situated Rumkale helps you imagine the magnificence of the area in ancient times.

**Zeugma**, once at the forefront of ancient art and culture, boasts some of the most magnificent artworks and sculptures from ancient Turkey. Founded by one of the generals of Alexander the Great, the name ‘Zeugma’ means ‘bridge passage’ and refers to the city’s location on the river Euphrates and its former strategic importance in the silk trade route. 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.

Total travel time : 4 hours
### Day 5  
**Gaziantep - Ankara**

Visit the Zeugma mosaic museum and explore the city of Gaziantep, enjoying the famous local cuisine. Then take a direct flight from Gaziantep to Ankara, where you will stay overnight.

The culinary capital of Eastern Turkey, **Gaziantep’s** famous baklava (pistachio pastries) are shipped all over the country and beyond, and its renowned restaurants serve up mouth-watering dishes. Besides cuisine, Gaziantep boasts a fine Seljuk-era citadel, numerous impressive mosques and restored old buildings. Gaziantep’s chief draw however, is its mosaic museum, believed to be the best in the world. The mosaics were recovered from the ancient Roman town of Zeugma, now underwater. The town’s bustling city markets are also well worth a visit.

The **Zeugma Museum** houses many impressive artworks and sculptures which testify to the area’s magnificence in Greek and Roman times. Its highlight however is a series of mosaics, the most famous of which is a mosaic known as the “Gypsy Girl”.

**Overnight in Hotel Tunali, Ankara**

### Day 6  
**Ankara - Gordion**

Take a tour of the city of Ankara, and visit the impressive Ankara Anatolian Civilisation Museum. In the afternoon, explore the Ankara Historical Fort before journeying to the archaeological site of Gordion. Continue on to Hattusa for overnight.

The **Ankara Anatolian Civilisation Museum** boasts many archaeological finds related to the excavations in Hattusa and Çatalhöyük, and will help you to gain a good understanding of these areas. The historical centre of Ankara sits overlooking the town on a hill and is littered with the remains of Hittite, Phrygian, Byzantine, Roman and Christian monuments and settlements. Of particular interest as a surviving example of ancient architecture is the Temple of Augustus. Often also referred to as ‘Angora’, Ankara is home to the Angora goat with its luxury wool and the unusual animal breeds of angora cats and rabbits.

**Occupied since the Bronze Age, 4000 years ago, Gordion is one of the most important archaeological sites in the near east. The city enjoyed its golden age in the first millennium when it was the royal capital of the Iron Age Kingdom known as ‘Phrygia’ to the Greeks and ‘Mushki’ to the neighbouring Assyrian Empire.**

**Total travel time : 4.5 hours**

**Overnight in Baskent Demiralan Hotel, Hattusa**
Day 7  
Hattusa

After an early breakfast, take time to visit the World Heritage Site of Hattusa. In the afternoon drive to Cappadocia and overnight in a cave style hotel.

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**Hattusa** was once the centre of the Hittite Empire, dating back to the late Bronze Age. Set in what were once rich agricultural fields and among scenic, rolling hills, the city has some fine examples of early ancient architecture. Originally the inner city was a vast array of temples and monuments, overlooked by the royal residence on the acropolis. An architectural masterpiece in its time, the city gateway was once adorned with reliefs of warriors, lions and sphinxes, framing four temples, each of which had their own courtyard. The city was destroyed, along with the Hittites themselves, in the 12th century BC. By the 20th century, the principal remains of Hittite inscriptions were found on over 10,000 tablets.

**Total travel time : 3.5 hours**

*Overnight in The MDC Cave Hotel, Cappadocia*

Day 8  
Cappadocia

Optional hot-air balloon ride (additional cost.) Full-day spent exploring the beautiful area of Cappadocia. Visit Ozkonak Underground City, Avanos, Zelve open-air museum, Uchisar castle and the fairy chimneys of Avcilar Valley. Overnight in Cappadocia.

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The town of **Avanos** is set on the banks of the Kizilirmak, (Red River). This river is the longest in Turkey and supplies the clay for pottery for which Avanos is so well known. Pottery has been produced in the Avanos area for centuries and some of the techniques still used date back to Hittite times (around 2000 BC).

**Uchisar** is situated at the highest point in Cappadocia, and is home to the most spectacular natural castles. The top of the **Uchisar Castle** provides a magnificent panorama of the surrounding area with Mount Erciyes in the distance. Many hollowed out rooms in the castle rock are connected to each other with stairs, tunnels and passages. Most of the rooms, located on the north side of the castle are in use as pigeon houses (dovecuts) today.

Discovered only as recently as 1972, **Ozkonak Underground City** is a warren of small chambers, tunnels and storage rooms that are arranged over a series of ten levels. This underground complex would have been used as a stronghold for the Hitties when under attack from neighbouring enemies and could house its inhabitants for up to 3 months. The city boasts a number of impressive features such as its sophisticated ventilation system and unique series of pipes that was used to pour hot oil on attackers attempting to breach the chamber doors.

**The Zelve Open-Air Museum** is a monastic cave town that has been carved into the rock face of three connecting valleys. Inhabited as recently as the 1950s, the eroding town of Zelve possesses both Christian and Muslim dwellings, reflecting the fact that for many centuries both religious groups resided peacefully in this town with one another.
Explore Goreme open-air museum, Devrent Valley and go for a 4km walk in the Red Valley to visit some rock-hewn churches and fairy chimneys. Visit the Greek village of Cavusin and a short visit of the Valley of the Pigeons. Overnight in Cappadocia.

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The Red Valley and Güllüdere Vadisi (Rose Valley) are two spectacular valleys in the Cappadocia region, each with varying types of rock formations and colour. The red valley shelters a series of intriguing rock-cut cave churches, with beautiful frescoes and paintings. Nearby is the Pigeon valley, named after the pigeon-cotes carved on its walls. The village of Old Cavusin was abandoned several decades ago due to avalanches. The current village of Cavusin is located on the road and is the typical authentic village. Old Cavusin, with its rock-cut dwellings and stone houses is home to the oldest church in Cappadocia. Ortahisar is another Cappadocian village dominated by a fortress-like rock rising above winding roads.

Devrent Valley is home to the famous Fairy Chimneys near Goreme and is known as the imaginary valley or animal valley due to the animal shapes in rocks. While Fairy chimneys can be found in much of Cappadocia, these are the best formed and most densely clustered. The volcanic rock of this area has allowed erosion to form these chimneys as well as other landforms such as caves, clefts and folds in the rock, making this breathtaking landscape unique. A thick layer of tuff (consolidated volcanic ash) is covered by a thinner layer of basalt which is more resistant to erosion than the underlying rock. Cracks in the basalt enable erosion of the underlying rock. These fairy chimneys were formed where the resistant rock remains protecting the underlying rock directly beneath it from erosion. The mineral-rich volcanic soil is excellent for growing fruit and vegetables, making Cappadocia a rich agricultural region. It has always been one of Anatolia's prime grape-growing areas and still boasts many productive vineyards and wineries. The Bible's New Testament tells of Cappadocia, but in fact this part of central Anatolia has been important since Hittite times, long before the time of Jesus.

The Goreme Open-Air Museum has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1984 and is a vast complex of monasteries, each of which has its own church. These churches are the finest of the rock-cut churches, boasting beautiful frescoes (wall paintings).

Overnight in The MDC Cave Hotel, Cappadocia
### Day 10  Çatalhöyük - Konya

**Meals**

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<td>Day 10</td>
<td>Çatalhöyük - Konya</td>
<td>Meals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>After breakfast, drive to Konya (305 km) stopping to visit the ancient site of Çatalhöyük where excavations are ongoing. Overnight in Konya.</td>
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Excavated as recently as the 1950s, Çatalhöyük is one of the best preserved examples of a Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlement. Built around two hills of the Anatolian plateau, the settlement was inhabited for two thousand years between 7500 BC and 5700 BC. Çatalhöyük began life as a village and, unusually, in a time when village settlements were abandoned and new land used to build cities, the buildings were adapted and urbanised to accommodate a growing population. With a particularly advanced culture for its time, Çatalhöyük boasts impressive early artworks: unusual artistic wall paintings, flint daggers decorated with bone handles and most notably, the clay and marble figurines found scattered around the site which archaeologists take as evidence of a female deity. The housing designs are perhaps the most striking – all the houses were clustered together in a maze-like manner, but instead of streets or footpaths the roofs functioned as paths between the houses which were accessed through steps and ladders leading to the ceiling. With no windows either, these ‘doorways’ in the ceiling were also the only means of ventilation. Çatalhöyük also had unusual burial customs, burying the dead under the floorboards, painting skulls with ochre to make them appear more lifelike.

**Total travel time : 3 hours**

Overnight in Hilton Garden Inn, Konya

### Day 11  Rumi - Departure

**Meals**

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<td>Day 11</td>
<td>Rumi - Departure</td>
<td>Meals</td>
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<td>After breakfast, visit the holy site of Rumi. Later take a flight back to Istanbul and connect to your departure flight.</td>
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The Holy City of Rumi gains its reputation in legend from the nearby city of Çatalhöyük, but it is best known for housing the shrine of Rumi, the great Sufi poet, who died in 1273. As well as the shrine, the site contains many interesting archaeological relics from the Seljuk period. However, Konya itself was established as a settlement as far back as the Bronze Age.

**Total travel time : 2 hours**