



WHY GO?

Turkey, six times the size of neighbouring Greece, borders seven countries, spans two continents and is surrounded by four seas. So unless you're very fortunate and have no time restrictions, you will need to be selective about what to see and do. Don't just think that Turkey is all about beaches, package holidays, kebabs and yoghurt, though – the country has a remarkable number of historical sights to explore.

There are many UNESCO World Heritage Sites throughout Turkey, including in Istanbul, Troy, Pamukkale and Cappadocia.

Turkey is a cheap short-haul destination, three-and-a-half hours from the UK, yet still outside of Europe's high exchange rates.

GETTING THERE

There are direct flights to Turkey from the UK – London to Istanbul is the busiest route operating all year. Other smaller regional airports only fly during the peak tourist season (April-October).

Airlines operating routes to Turkey

Before you book your flight, ensure that your passport is valid for at least six months.

- British Airways (www.britishairways.com)
- Easyjet (www.easyjet.com)
- Pegasus Airlines (www.pegasusairlines.com)
- Thomas Cook (www.thomascook.com)
- Thomson Airways (www.flights.thomson.co.uk)
- Turkish Airlines (www.thy.com)

Turkey

We tracked down several ancient wonders – and explored Istanbul to find out what to see and do and where to stay

Flights to Istanbul

- Birmingham:** Turkish Airlines
- London Gatwick:** British Airways, Turkish Airlines, Easyjet
- London Heathrow:** British Airways, Turkish Airlines
- London Luton:** Easyjet.
- London Stansted:** Pegasus, Turkish Airlines
- Manchester:** Easyjet, Turkish Airlines
- Flights to Dalaman**
- Birmingham/Bournemouth/East Midlands:** Thomson
- London Gatwick:** Easyjet, Thomas Cook, Thomson
- London Luton:** Thomson
- London Stansted:** Pegasus
- Manchester:** Easyjet, Thomson
- Flights to Antalya**
- Birmingham:** Thomson
- London Gatwick:** Monarch Charter, Thomas Cook
- London Stansted:** Pegasus, Thomson
- Luton/Manchester/Newcastle:** Thomson

TOUR OPERATORS

- Alternative Travel (Tel 020 7249 9800, www.alternativeturkey.com)
- Anatolian Sky (Tel 0845 365 1011, www.anatoliansky.co.uk)
- Cachet Travel (Tel 020 7249 9800, www.cachet-travel.co.uk)
- IAH Ltd (Tel 0871 855 2925, www.iah-holidays.co.uk/iah/)
- Kuoni (Tel 01306 747 002, www.kuoni.co.uk)
- Martin Randall (Tel 020 8742 3355, www.martinrandall.com)
- Original Travel (Tel 020 7978 7333, www.originaltravel.co.uk)
- Page & Moy Holidays (Tel 0800 567 7400, www.pageandmoy.com)
- Thomas Cook Signature (Tel 0844 871 0663, <http://thomascooksignature.inbro.net/main>)

GETTING AROUND

Travelling inland by road in Turkey is currently quicker than by train.

Public transport

Trams, buses, taxis and *dolmus* (shared taxis) are all cheap. Meter systems operate in all taxis – all other transport prices are fixed (65p per single journey in Istanbul). Buses and trams can get crowded. Taxis are reasonably priced, they are all metered and most drivers speak English (or are able to understand English).

WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit Turkey is between April-May and September-October. Temperatures and tourist numbers begin to fall in October, making it an ideal time to visit (October 29th is Republic Day with parades in many cities). June-August are hot (temperatures range from 30-40°C), and this is also the peak tourist season, so some popular attractions will be busy, and you might end up queuing much of the time in the heat.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO IN AND AROUND ISTANBUL

This huge metropolis has been known by three names throughout its history – Byzantium, Constantinople and Istanbul. Istanbul (which has been awarded the accolade of European Capital of Culture 2010) is a wonderful tapestry of domes, slender minarets, mosques, churches and synagogues. Though no longer Turkey's capital (Ankara has been since 1923), Istanbul remains the most significant city in the country. Allow yourself at least three to four days to visit.

Archaeological Museum

This impressive museum complex, entered through the Gulhane Park, includes not only a vast majority of pieces from excavations carried

out by Hamdi Bey at Sidon in 1887, but also the Museum of the Ancient Orient. The museum houses a small collection of Anatolian and Egyptian artefacts, as well as the tiled pavilion known as Çinili Köşk, built in 1472 and home to an impressive collection of Turkish ceramics.

Open 9am-4pm

Admission 10 new Turkish Lira (£4)

■ Aya Sofia (Hagia Sophia)

This 'Church of Divine Wisdom' is a modern-day wonder, reputed to have taken 10,000 people six years to build back in the 6th century. The large Byzantine temple first served as a church for over 800 years, then was used as a mosque by the Ottoman Empire for more than 600 years, before Mustafa Kamal Atatürk, the founder of modern secular Turkey, turned the building into a museum in the early 1940s.

Viewing the interior of this museum for the first time really does take your breath away. The dome is more than 33 metres in diameter, 56 metres high, and is supported by four gigantic piers that are held aloft by over 40 arched windows – the Statue of Liberty in New York (which is 46 metres tall, minus its pedestal and foundation) could fit beneath the dome.

Scaffolding is currently in place, but this doesn't detract from the splendour of the building itself (attracting over two million visitors a year). The interior covers an area of 7,570 sq metres (1.85 acres). Inside, you'll see huge wooden medallions with Islamic inscriptions that were added after the Ottoman conquest to cover up Christian symbols behind them.

Head up the gentle sloping cobbled ramp to the left of the entrance to reach the upper tier gallery, where you'll discover some amazing mosaics. These were all whitewashed when the building was converted to a mosque (evidently helping to preserve them). The 'Deesis' is our favourite and depicts Christ with Virgin Mary and John the Baptist on either side of him. Look closely at the tiny pieces that make-up this photo-like mosaic – the facial hues, colours and even the wrinkles are exquisite.

Open 10am-5pm (closed Mondays)

Admission 20 new Turkish Lira (£9)

■ Basilica Cistern (Sunken Palace)

One of the most spectacular caverns, which was rediscovered in 1545 – in time for James Bond (Sean Connery) to row through it in the film *From Russia With Love*. Ensure you walk along the raised wooden pathways to find the two Medusa heads at the far end.

Open 10am-6pm (closed Tuesdays)

Admission 10 new Turkish Lira (£4)

■ Kapali Carsi (Covered Bazaar)

This claims to be the largest covered bazaar – it's a bit touristy, but still compelling. You can explore the 5000 stalls here.

Open 10am-5pm

Admission free entry

■ Cağaloğlu Hamami

One of the best and oldest Turkish bath houses in Istanbul. There are different opening times and entrances for men (7am-10pm) and women (8am-8pm).

Admission €30 (£27)

■ Blue Mosque (Sultanahmet Camii)

This six-minaret Imperial mosque across the park from St Sophia was built in the 17th century by the architect Mehmet. Known as the Blue Mosque (below) because of its magnificent interior featuring over 21,000 blue, Iznik tiles, the building was completed in 1616, just before the Ottoman Empire began to wane. According to legend, the 16th Sultan, Ahmed I, wanted a minaret made of *altın* (gold), but the architect misunderstood him and thought he said *alti* (six) – no sultan had a mosque with six minarets before.

Visitors enter the mosque through the northern door and must remove their shoes. Dress appropriately. Legs should be covered (and women should cover their head and shoulders – scarves are available at the door). Avoid visiting on Fridays, or at prayer times throughout any other day.

Open seven days a week (except during prayer times). Free entry, but donations greatly received

■ Topkapi Palace (Topkapi Sarayı)

Built between 1459-1465, this palace was the centre of the Ottoman Empire for just under 400 years until the imperial hub was moved to the new Dolmabahçe Palace across the Golden Horn in 1853. The palace consists of a number of buildings positioned around four courtyards.

Open 9am-5pm

Admission 20 new Turkish Lira (£9)

■ Pera Museum

Close to the famous Pera Palais Hotel, this newly renovated museum holds five floors of exhibitions. The top two are visiting exhibitions.

Open 10am-5pm

Admission 7 new Turkish Lira. Concessions 3 new Turkish Lira (£3/£1.20)

Disabled access ramp and lift



GOOD PLACES TO STAY

Prices are for the cheapest double room, with breakfast and taxes, in October 2009.

CAPPADOCIA

In terms of where to stay, who could resist a night in one of the many rock hotels? You can sleep in a cave room.

■ Burca Kaya Hotel

☎ 0090 38434 33200

www.burcakayaotel.com.tr

This quaint, cave-type hotel, located in Ortahisar, in the centre of Cappadocia.

The rooms on the upper level are quiet and spacious. **Double room B&B from £45**

ISTANBUL

■ Armada Hotel

☎ 0090 21245 54455

www.armadahotel.com.tr

Ottoman-style rooms traditionally decorated with wooden panelling known as 'Edirnekârî'. The rooftop terrace has delightful views of the Istanbul skyline of mosques, minarets and the waterway across to the Asian side.

Double room B&B from £113

■ Four Seasons – Sultanahmet Tevkifhane

☎ 0090 21263 88200

<http://www.fourseasons.com/istanbul/>

This former prison in Sultanahmet has been completely overhauled and now is one of the finest hotels in the heart of this imperial city. If you can't stay, make sure you visit and enjoy a meal in the sumptuous Seasons restaurant.

Double room B&B €240 (£216)

■ Hotel Empress Zoe

☎ 0090 21251 82504

www.emzoe.com

This small, privately run hotel offers accommodation in the heart of old Istanbul. The rooms are accessed by a narrow spiral staircase. **Double room B&B from €110 (£90)**

■ Marmara Pera Hotel

☎ 0090 21225 14646

www.themarmarahotels.com

Opposite the famous Pera Palais Hotel in the historic Pera district. This circular tower block of a hotel is ideally located in the centre of the new European Istanbul. **Double room B&B from £90**

■ Ottoman Imperial Hotel

☎ 0090 21251 36151

www.ottomanhotelimperial.com

A delightful wooden mansion-house on a quiet cobbled street positioned to the rear of the famous Aya Sofia, a perfect location to explore the surrounding area. **Double room B&B from £90**

GOOD PLACES TO VISIT OUTSIDE ISTANBUL

■ Cappadocia (Kapadokya)

Approximately nine hours by road from Pamukkale, Cappadocia is truly surreal – more so when you realise that it is still a living landscape, with numerous ‘fairy chimneys’ that have been hollowed out for use as family homes. You can admire these extraordinary fairy chimneys, which have been shaped over the course of millions of years, then delve down to explore the cavernous underground cities.

The sheer number and variety of places to visit here can be quite bewildering, but the archetypal travellers’ utopia is Göreme, where you’ll find the open-air museum, a World Heritage Site and home to many of the area’s natural wonders.

■ Ephesus (Efes)

Located between two mountains (about 170 km from Pergamon) you’ll find Turkey’s best-preserved and most photographed ancient site, offering the most extensive remains of any Roman city outside of modern-day Italy. Ephesus is famous for the Temple of Artemis (one of the original seven ancient wonders), though now just a solitary column remains.

Ephesus’ uniqueness lies in its feature as a city as a whole, as most of the ruins here date from the Roman Imperial Age (from 27 BC).

What to see: The main walkway is lined with temples, colonnades, baths and private houses in varying stages of preservation. You can see the terracotta pipes of the Roman baths before heading down the magnificent white marble ‘Curetes Way’.

On the right you’ll see the famous communal Roman men’s toilets (latrines). On the left, the ‘terrace house’, a three-storey Roman mansion with mosaic floors and wall murals, offering a glimpse of the interior design of that era. Though extra to enter (15 Turkish Lira), it is worth it. Outside the entrance is the tomb of Cleopatra’s sister, Princess Arsinoe.

There are two entrances to the vast site. The best one to use is to the south, off Meryem Ana Yolu road, as this allows you to walk the whole historical complex downhill, which is slightly less arduous. Try to visit early morning or early evening to avoid crowds as this is one of the most popular sites in Turkey. You’ll need a couple of hours to fully appreciate all that there is to see.

Undoubtedly the main attractions, though, are the Library of Celsus and the huge Theatre. Take a closer look at the columns of the library and you’ll notice that thicker columns were used higher up and thinner ones lower down, creating the illusion that the library was much grander than it really is. A secret tunnel leading to the brothel was also recently discovered.

The last stop is the Greco-Roman theatre. Climb to the top of the 25,000-seat theatre to get an overview of the whole site as you look back up the hill.

Open 10am-5pm

Admission 20 new Turkish Lira (£9)

ALSO VISIT:

Less than a mile’s stroll from the north entrance (Dr Sabri Yayla Bul), under the shade of Mulberry trees, brings you to Selçuk Museum. This houses a fine collection of statuary and the aforementioned Temple of Artemis – though there isn’t much of the original left.

■ Virgin Mary House (Meryemana)

Discovered in this wooded vale in 1891 after a nun’s vision, the diminutive chapel on the site was found to have foundations dating from the 1st century AD. It is said to be the place where the Virgin Mary settled after leaving the Holy Land in the aftermath of the Crucifixion.

Open daily (dawn-dusk)

Admission 11 new Turkish Lira (£4.60)

■ Göreme Open Air Museum

Home to many of the area’s natural wonders, a World Heritage Site and full of fantastic frescoes of Byzantine religious art. The skyline at Cappadocia (at the very heart of Anatolia), is one of the most incredible.

Open 10am-5pm

Admission 20 new Turkish Lira (£9)

■ Pamukkale

About two-and-a-half hours from the town of Selçuk (near Ephesus) are the extensive ruins of the Roman spa town of Hierapolis and the famous white travertines (sedimentary rock formations) of Pamukkale.

Pamukkale means ‘cotton castle’ and is an apt description of the white tumbling hillside terraces. This extraordinary natural phenomenon is a popular attraction – in the summer be prepared to share the vistas with scores of tourists (over one million people visit each year). This natural white winterland is a bizarre network of white stalactite rock formations, hot springs and shallow pools.



The white hillside terraces and pools in Pamukkale

Since being granted World Heritage Site status in 1988, access to the travertines is carefully controlled. Only one narrow channel has been left for visitors to walk through the pools (without shoes), though the slightly bumpy terrain can be tough on sensitive feet.

Head first to the museum (an additional charge 3 new Turkish Lira), as this tends to be less crowded. Inside the three rooms, (which once housed the Roman baths), you’ll find spectacular sarcophagi, Roman statuary and friezes. Nearby is an antique thermal pool (an additional 23 new Turkish Lira). You can bathe amid original marble columns that are submerged in the hot waters here – don’t forget your towel!

There are three entrances to Pamukkale: from the south gate the walk is much shorter to the terraces (approx 10-15 minutes). On entering, follow the path up to the first pool – you can’t walk in this section, but it’s the best place to take photos as you can get a clear view of the cascades of petrified rockpools without people in the pools ruining your shot.

There is a shuttle bus (2 new Turkish Lira per journey) to the further located ruins, such as the theatre and the cemetery. The necropolis has over 1,200 sarcophagi, as Hierapolis was a place where the sick came for a miracle cure, but the scale of the necropolis suggests mixed results.

To inspect these sprawling ruins (only 10 per cent of it has been uncovered so far), could take a day, but a few hours here will give you ample time to see the highlights mentioned above.

Open 10am-5pm

Admission 20 new Turkish Lira (£9)

■ Pergamon (Pergamum)

Approximately two hours from Troy by road, near the city of Bergama, is the crumbling Acropolis of Pergamon, one of two main historical sites in this area dating from the Anatolian Kingdom of 250 BC (the other is the Roman medical centre at Asclepion, 3 km south – also worth a visit, but there is an extra entrance fee).

The vertigo-inducing 10,000-seat Hellenistic theatre is one of the main attractions at the Acropolis. Built into the steep hillside, it’s a



The Hellenistic theatre at Pergamon

remarkable piece of ancient engineering offering spectacular views. Because of the location of the theatre, it is best approached from the north side, entering part of the way up the 81 rows of seating. From here you can continue up the remaining few rows to pass through the top doorway to the King's Palace and Library areas.

Pergamon, once the site of the second largest library in the world (the first was in Alexandria in Egypt) is said to contain 200,000 scrolls – the first recorded inscriptions written on animal skins (pergamum paper) from which the English word 'parchment' derives.

Open 10am-5pm

Admission 20 new Turkish Lira (£9)

■ Troy (Truva)

It may come as a surprise to learn that Troy, the renowned city in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, actually exists on the northwest coast of Turkey (approximately five hours by road from Istanbul). But this historical site (discovered in the 1870s) is far from being the mighty fortified city of King Priam and Helen – it's perhaps even a little bit of a letdown.

The potent symbol of the demise of this legendary city, the Trojan wooden horse, is positioned near the entrance. Obviously the horse you'll see is not the original (this one was

built in 1973), however it allows you to relive the siege of Troy, when the Greeks tricked their way into the city walls. Today, you can climb inside this horse, look out of the windows and imagine how the Trojans were fooled. You can envisage what the scattered remains reflect – the walls and foundations along the circular pathway are clearly labelled, and the site offers photo opportunities.

Before exiting, it's worth popping into the excavation house (next to the horse), which doubles as a museum of sorts, and highlights the uncovering of the ancient site. Superimposed photographs offer a vision to visitors of what it might have been like in ancient times and there are many photos of the continued excavation.

Open 10am-5pm

Admission 15 new Turkish Lira (£6)

CHURCHES:

■ **Snake Church (Yılanlı Kilise)** Remarkable painting of St George slaying a faded dragon (represented here as a snake).

■ **Dark Church (Karanlık Kilise)** Once part of a monastery complex with 11th-century frescoes. The lack of light not only helped name it, but preserved its vivid colour (8 new Turkish Lira, £3).

■ **Buckle Church (Tokalı Kilise)** Located outside the main ticketed area, but covered by the museum ticket. The biggest church with superbly

coloured frescoes on a deep blue background. Walking and hiking are also popular activities in this area and there are plenty of marked trails. One of the easiest with a great view is to head out to Uchisar Hill, a 15-minute walk from Göreme. Or you can float above the colourful valleys in a hot-air balloon.

■ Underground City at Kaymaklı

The underground complexes became popular with Christians escaping Roman rule.

Open 10am-5pm

Admission 7.50 new Turkish Lira (£3)

USEFUL INFORMATION

Currency (conversion rates as of Sept 2009).

£1 = 2.47 new Turkish Lira. The Euro is also used throughout Turkish hotels. £1 = €1.23

RECOMMENDED GUIDEBOOK AND WEBSITE

■ **Lonely Planet Turkey**, £16.99

(ISBN 10174104927X)

■ www.goturkey.co.uk



GENERAL TIPS

If planning an organised tour

■ Book with an agent who specialises in tours of Turkey and ensure they are fully bonded and licensed and that they use local guides.

■ Visit at the right time. Many tour companies don't run trips during July and August, when temperatures are high and historical sites become extremely crowded.

■ Pay an additional excursions (excluding those on the itinerary) by cash. We found large credit card transactions (such as the Cappadocia balloon ride) incurred an additional charge for credit card payments, typically 10%.

■ Check your group size – ideally there should be no more than 12. Also check the fitness level of the tour and that it's suitable for you.

■ Check what the price you paid for the tailor-made tour in Turkey covers. We had to take additional cash to pay for all excursions, tips and lunches. Credit card transactions can incur an additional charge, typically 10%.

■ Book early as places in the cooler spring and autumn months are popular. You need a tourist visa for Turkey, which can be purchased at the Turkish airport on arrival – do this before you join the queue for passport control – it will cost £10 (ensure you use a sterling note).

GOOD PLACES TO EAT

GOREME

■ Nazar Börek Gözleme Restaurant

A fresh and varied selection is on offer in this tiny restaurant – try the sweet and savoury Turkish pastries. Main meal with soft drink 14 new Turkish Lira (£5.80).

ISTANBUL

■ Mozaik Restaurant Sultanahmet

Divan Yolu Cad, Incili Çavuş Sok 1
Traditional late 19th-century house with pavement seating on a quiet cobbled street in the centre of old Istanbul.

The menu at the Mozaik offers a vast selection of Ottoman, Armenian and Greek dishes. Main meal with glass of wine 30 new Turkish Lira (£13)

■ Amarda Restaurant

Ahirkapi Str No 24

© 0090 21245 54455

www.armadahotel.com.tr

A rooftop restaurant with a range of traditional dishes. Main meal with a glass of wine 40 new Turkish Lira (£17).

■ Doy Doy Restaurant

Şifa Hamami Sokak No 13, Sultanahmet

© 0090 21251 71588

www.doydoyrestaurant.com

In the heart of old Istanbul is this four-storey restaurant boasting fantastic views. Meat and vegetarian options on offer. Mains with soft drink 15 new Turkish Lira (£6).

■ Mikla Restaurant

The Marmara Pera Hotel, Meşrutiyet Caddesi No 15

© 0090 21229 35656

www.miklarestaurant.com

This has to be one of the best eateries in Istanbul – the food

served here is divine but costly – wooden tables throughout with spectacular views of both the Golden Horn (the harbour waterway that divides the old and the new European Istanbul) and the Bosphorus, the channel that divides Istanbul between Europe and Asia – the only place in the world where this divide occurs! Main meal from 38 new Turkish Lira, small glass of wine from 37 new Turkish Lira (£16).

SELÇUK

■ Yedi Uyuyanlar Restaurant

A fantastic little garden oasis serving a variety of meat and vegetarian dishes. Reputably one of the oldest restaurants throughout Turkey - the crepes are a speciality (you can even view them being prepared in the open range kitchen). Main meal with soft drink 12 Turkish Lira (£5).