



# Turkey

## A MIDEASTERN FLAVOUR TO OUR ENTRY INTO EUROPE AS THE SKY IS STUDDED WITH DOMES AND MINARETS

### About Turkey

Geographically, Turkey falls under both Asia and Europe, but views itself as European and is in fact in talks to gain full membership of the EU. It shares a border with Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia, Armenia, Iran and Syria.



### When To Visit

Anytime between April and November. The tourist season hits its peak in July and August.

### Visa Requirements

Turkey has varying requirements for visas (citizens of many countries don't need them at all), so it's best to check with the nearest embassy. Fees and duration of stay also varies; visas (if needed) must be obtained in advance.

### Getting There

Many world airlines have flights to major Turkish cities. There are also many coach, car ferry and cruise ship connections.



### Bahrain Connection

Turkey has long enjoyed close links with Bahrain. Citizens of the two countries are exempt from needing visitor visas, and talks are underway on a free trade agreement between Turkey and Gulf Arab states including Bahrain.

IF LEBANON IS THE MOST 'EUROPEAN' OF THE Middle Eastern states, then Turkey must be the most 'Middle Eastern' of European countries. Given its location – straddling both the Asian and



Christine, Deirdre and Martin on the roof of Hotel Hali in Istanbul.

European continents, that is not entirely surprising.

We entered Turkey after a long drive from Lebanon, crossing through Syria once again. For the first time on our tour, we are in a country where the main language is not Arabic. Most people, naturally, speak Turkish, whose written script (like that of English) is Latin. Despite none of our group of adventurers speaking the local language, communicating is not a problem at all. Almost everyone we came across spoke at least some English or Arabic (also German and French).

While Turkey is an almost exclusively Muslim country, the dress is more European than Middle Eastern. It's rare to find a woman with her head covered, especially in the resort areas.

We spent our first night in Iskendrun, in the south of Turkey, then drove the next morning to Istanbul where we stayed at Hotel Hali. The Turkish capital is the world's second most populated city; only



### PAGE OPPOSITE:

Istanbul's imperial Mosque of Sultan Ahmet I (Sultan Ahmet Camii) is called the Blue Mosque because of its interior tiles, mostly on the upper level and difficult to see unless you're right up there with them.



Ali and Christine with Turkish host Ahmet outside the Chamber of Commerce.



The team enjoying sweets at the Baklavaci Gulluoglu baklava factory.



Mexico City is more crowded. The Turks have a reputation for hospitality, and as we experienced first hand, this is well earned. Ali's friend Ahmet Karamisir very graciously took time off to show us around. It is good to have him as a tour guide, traffic in the cities is generally just terrible and parking next to impossible if you don't know your way around.

Istanbul's skyline is studded with domes and minarets, and it really is beautiful to behold. We visited the Blue Mosque, which should be on the must-see list of anyone visiting the city. Ahmet also took us on a tour of the Baklavaci Gulluoglu baklava factory, reputed to be the world's biggest baklava makers. With some of the finest baklava on offer, this was a treat in more ways than one!

Another highlight of our Turkey stopover was the visit to Istanbul's Grand Bazaar. Built in 1464 under orders of Sultan Mehmed II, the





Istanbul's Dolmabahçe Palace is a fitting symbol of the magnificence and decadence of the 19th-century Ottoman Empire. It's just as a sultan's palace should be: huge and sumptuous, with 285 rooms, 43 large salons, a 4,000 kg Bohemian glass chandelier, and a Bosphorus-shore façade nearly half a kilometre long.

*Fast Fact*  
When bargaining in the market, it's considered extremely rude not to buy something after stating or accepting a price.



One of the many excellent beaches along the Turkish coastline.

Grand Bazaar with an estimated 4,000 shops is one of the largest covered markets in the world.

A giant labyrinth, the Bazaar's fine shops and exotic atmosphere, mingling the ancient and new, make it a "must-see" in Istanbul. You will find "tunnels" filled with hundreds of gold smiths, traditional Turkish decorations, leather clothes and accessories, quilts, carpets, arts and crafts, and a whole lot more.

*Pazarlık* (bargaining) is a social as well as a business tradition in Turkey which means shopping often is a long drawn out affair. If you do have the time though, bargaining can be fun and you get some satisfaction of getting a product at far below the quoted price.

One thing you might want to buy is the Nazar Bonjuk – a Turkish good-luck "evil eye" charm. Wear one when going around Turkey and it'll make Turks

you meet break into a smile.

They'll be surprised and delighted to see you, a foreigner, wearing a Nazar. It tells them that you're a friend who is interested in Turkish culture and crafts, and you'll get a warm reception.

The Nazar Bonjuk was born of the age-old "evil eye" superstition that one person can cast a spell on another. To prevent this, Anatolian artisans created blue glass "eyes" that "look" straight back at the spell-caster as if to say "I see what you're doing, and you can't get away with it!"

It has no religious significance, and few people really believe in the evil eye superstition any more. But it's such an enjoyable tradition, and a beautiful little piece of craft-art, that you'll see Nazar Bonjuks all over Turkey – especially on babies.

