

HIKING JOURNEY

Treasures Of Cappadocia & Eastern Turkey

WALKING TOUR IN CAPPADOCIA, EASTERN TURKEY AND THE BLACK SEA REGION

17 DAYS



WALKABOUT
GOURMET ADVENTURES

Journey Overview

Three million years ago violent eruptions of Mount Erciyes (3,916 metres) and Mount Hasan (3,300 metres) covered the surrounding plateau of Cappadocia with tuff – a soft stone comprised of lava, ash and mud. The wind and rain have eroded this brittle rock and created a surrealist landscape of rock cones, capped pinnacles and fretted ravines, in colours that range from warm reds and golds to cool greens and greys.

Goreme is one of those rare regions in the world where the works of men blend into the natural surroundings.

During Byzantine times, chapels and monasteries were hollowed out of the rock, their ochre-toned frescoes reflecting the hues of the surrounding landscape. Even today troglodyte dwellings in rock cones and village houses of volcanic tufa merge harmoniously into the landscape. Cappadocia is also a natural wonder and a unique area in the world, loaded with history.

On our walk we explore the surreal landforms of the Goreme valleys and enjoy the blaze of colours. Following ancient pathways, we visit the strange rock-cut churches and monasteries carved from the soft volcanic tuff.

We continue to south-eastern Anatolia which is rich in history and cultural heritage with many magnificent historical sites, dating back to 7,000 BC. Mount Nemrut is an impressive peak rising from a flat plain in northern Mesopotamia and stretches to a height of 2,150 metres. It is unrivalled in its historical treasures and the gigantic statues. The toppled heads of Apollo, Zeus and Hercules are just amazing.

We continue eastward to Sanliurfa, the birthplace of Abraham and once an important post on the ancient trade routes between Mesopotamia and the mediterranean coast. Today it hosts one of the best bazaars in Turkey.

Our trail takes us through Harran, famous for the unusual and fanciful beehive-shaped houses and to Mardin, one of the oldest cities in Mesopotamia and well known for its delicious food.

Van is one of the most important cities of the old Vaspurakan region and located on the east coast of Lake Van. It is the largest lake in Turkey at an altitude of 1,720 metres and ringed by beautiful mountains. Here we also visit the island of Akdamar, just half an hour from the shore with a church from 921.

Dramatic Doğubayazıt, set on a stark treeless plain between ranges of craggy mountains, is the last Turkish town on the highway to Iran, just 35 kms to the border. From the striking 18th century Ishak Pasha Palace we gaze upon legendary Mount

Ararat (5,137 metres). According to the Bible it was in the Ararat Mountains where Noah's ark landed.

We journey on to Kars, famous for its cheeses and goose meat. South-east towards the border with Armenia, we visit the fascinating old site of Ani. Once a wealthy rival of Kars, it is now a ghost town. Ani lies close to a great ravine which demarcates the border. The ruined 1,000-year-old churches contain remarkable wall paintings and sculptured decorations.

We drive east towards the Black Sea Mountains and walk in the Lake Cildir region. This huge and glorious lake is curiously unknown to tourists. The landscape reminds us of some remote Scottish lochs and it is an intensely arable area. We walk on the plateaux of Artvin and Savsat, an attractive hilly area, surrounded by high mountains on all sides, including the 3,537 metres Karçkal Mountains to the west, watered by many mountain streams and pools. They are an extension of the Caucasus and separate the Black Sea from Anatolia. The weather in Artvin is very wet and the forest is every shade of green imaginable. This greenery runs from the top all the way down to the Black Sea coast where we finish our tour in Trabzon.



Journey Schedule

DAY 1

Kayseri – Ürgüp – Walk Through The Meskendir, Red And Rose Valleys

DAY 2

Akvadi – Uchisar – Guvercinlik – Open Air Museum

DAY 3

Cooking Lesson in Ayvali Village then Walk from Gomedra to Uzengi Valley via Sarica Church

DAY 4

Ürgüp – Adiyaman

DAY 5

Mount Nemrut Dağı – Cendere Bridge And Arsemia – Atatuerk Dam – Sanliurfa

DAY 6

Gobekli Temple – Abraham’s Cave – Holy Fish Lake (Balikligol)

DAY 7

Sanliurfa – Harran – Mardin

DAY 8

Mardin – Hasankeyf – Tatvan

DAY 9

Mount Nemrut Crater Lake – Walk Around Ahlat – Tatvan

DAY 10

Akdamar Island – Lunch – Visit Silver Manufactory And Shop – Van Cats

DAY 11

Van – Dogubayazit – İshak Paşa Sarayı, Crater Hole, Noah’s Arche – Kars

DAY 12

Drive to Bogaz Koy Village – Cooking Class – Walk back to Kars

DAY 13

Kars – Morning Free – Visit of Ani Ruins – Boga Tepe – Cheese Museum (Dinner)

DAY 14

Kars – Cilder Lake Island Walk – Satan’s Castle – Şavşat

DAY 15

Walk From Karagöl To Velikoy

DAY 16

Walk from Pinarli Village to Fish Lake And Karagöl

DAY 17

Şavşat – Teagardens – Trabzon – End Of Tour

After our pick-up we leave Kayseri and travel southwest to Ürgüp in Cappadocia. Here we check into our hotel and then start our walk in the Meskendir Valley. It will lead us into the Red Valley (Kizil Çukur) and along the way we stop in a cave garden restaurant. Here we can taste their speciality - Mantı - a kind of Turkish Ravioli.

In the afternoon we continue to the Rose Valley and visit the colonnaded church and the church with the cross.

After our visit we re-join our bus and return to our hotel. Dinner tonight will be in the Dimrit restaurant in Ürgüp.

 **4 - 5 HOURS**

 **URGUP, TURKEY**



DAY 2

Akvadi - Uchisar - Guvercinlik - Open Air Museum

We leave at approximately 9.00 in the morning and visit Troy. Archaeological excavations have revealed nine separate periods of settlement, including ruins of city walls, house foundations, a temple and a theatre. A symbolic wooden Trojan horse commemorates the legendary war.

In the afternoon we arrive in Selcuk. Our hotel is in an idyllic setting, surrounded by lavender and vineyards. Attached to the hotel is the winery with many delicious wines to taste.

Dinner tonight will be at the hotel's restaurant where we can enjoy a flavoursome Turkish-Mediterranean cuisine.

 **2-3 HOURS**

 **SELCUK, TURKEY**



DAY 3

Cooking Lesson in Ayvali Village then Walk from Gomedra to Uzengi Valley via Sarica Church

Today we have the opportunity to be guests at a local home and experience the Turkish hospitality. We learn to cook traditional Turkish dishes with cooking techniques and secrets from "Motte Havva" (Eve). Together we will prepare the recipes and use fruits, vegetables and spices farmed in the home garden. For lunch we can enjoy eating what we have made in the morning.

After lunch and a short bus ride to Gomedra, we begin our walk. This region is not only renowned for its magnificent landscape but also for its excellent wines which are grown in the fine and very fertile volcanic soil. Viticulture has been here since the Hittites but it was the exiled Christians who really developed the vineyards. Wine is a culture gradually gaining more prestige in Turkey and the Öküzgözü and Boğazkere are amongst the best.

Other produce from this volcanic region includes walnuts, mulberries and a variety of fruit. Often the largest rock cones are used as depots for citrus and other fresh fruit. The evening is at your own leisure.

 **3 HOURS**

 **URGUP, TURKEY**



DAY 4

Ürgüp – Adiyaman

Today we leave Cappadocia and travel a long way southeast to Adiyaman. Along the way we stop in Göksun for lunch where we can also treat ourselves to one of these delicious super thick ice creams, which originated in this region.

In the late afternoon we arrive at our hotel in Adiyaman, which has a convenient location to visit the Nemrut Dağı Mountain.

Dinner will be in a nearby local restaurant.

 **HOTEL EUPHRAT NEMRU, KAARADUT, TURKEY**



DAY 5

Mount Nemrut Dağı - Cendere Bridge And Arsemia - Atatuerk Dam – Sanliurfa

Today we drive up to Mount Nemrut (2,134 metres) which is topped by a strange collection of huge statues. These colossal stone heads at the top of Mount Nemrut National Park are one of Turkey's most famous sites. They represent Greek and Persian gods and formed part of the tomb and temple complex built by Antiochus I (69–34 B.C BC), who reigned over the Commagene kingdom.

The kingdom fell soon after and the site was completely forgotten. It was only rediscovered in the late 1800s when the Germans were surveying for a railroad they were building for Turkey. It is now a UNESCO world heritage site and the 8th wonder of the ancient world.

We tackle the rather steep 30-minute climb to experience this impressive but isolated sight. We start at the east terrace to see the giant heads on that side, then we walk around the mountain to the west terrace to the heads and temple on that side. The heads are well preserved and impressive while the bodies of the heads remain strewn around.

We drive to the Cendere Bridge (Severan Bridge), which was constructed in honour of Roman Emperor Septimius Severus, who reigned from 193–211 AD, and his wife, Julia Domna. Hard to believe this amazing bridge is in Turkey and not in Italy!

We continue, meeting up again with our own bus and visit the ancient city of Arsemia, which was founded by the ancestors of Commagenes, Arsemia in the 2nd century BC. Besides having beautiful and different residues, the largest known Greek inscriptions of Anatolia are in this ancient city.

On our way to Sanliurfa we have a short stop at the Atatürk Dam on the Euphrates River. It is located in Bozova in the Sanliurfa Province of the Anatolia region of southeast Turkey. Built to supply water for irrigation and power generation, it is the largest dam in the country and ranks sixth amongst the largest earth-and-rock fill embankment dams in the world.

Previously called the Karababa Dam, it was renamed in the honour of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the first President of the Republic of Turkey.

Construction of the dam and the hydroelectric power project was undertaken from 1983 to 1990. The first two power units were commissioned in 1992 and its entire operations began in December 1993.

We check into our hotel at Sanliurfa and dinner tonight will be at our hotel.

 **3 HOURS**

 **MANICI HOTEL SANLIURFA, TURKEY**



DAY 6

Gobekli Temple - Abraham's Cave - Holy Fish Lake (Balikligol)

This morning we drive to the Gobekli Temple, the world's oldest at 12,000 years, which baffles historians and turns theories about human history on their heads with its mysterious circles of megalithic pillars carved with images of animals. It is directly on Abraham's long-distance walking trail, which we might follow for a little while.

Back in Sanliurfa we explore some of the many holy monuments of Urfa. The city has always been a centre of religious pilgrimages, being the reputed birthplace of Abraham. We visit the Dergah complex, with the Hizir Ibrahim Halilullah mosque and cave where Abraham is believed to have been born and hidden from the wrath of King Nimrod for 7 years. From here we will walk to the shady park of Golbasi in the historic centre, where looms the ancient citadel. Legend states that Nemrut (Nimrod) hurled Abraham from the citadel into a fire below; by the hand of God, the fire turned to water and the hot coals into fish. Here we find two sacred pools filled with carp which are fed by locals and pilgrims.

It is a pleasure to get lost in the twisting maze of Urfa's historical market, bursting with colourful fabrics, exotic spices and artisan copperware while remarkably free from sales pressure. The colourful bazaar is also the perfect place for lunch.

Late in the afternoon we visit the magnificent mosaic museum.

The penetrating obsidian eye of what is thought to be the world's oldest statue welcomes us to the treasure trove of artefacts in the Urfa Museum.



3 HOURS



MANICI HOTEL SANLIURFA, TURKEY

DAY 7

Sanliurfa - Harran – Mardin

Today we leave Sanliurfa and drive to Harran whose inhabitants are of Syrian-Arabic origins. Harran is thought to have been inhabited continuously for over 6,000 years, making it one of the oldest settlements of the world. The Prophet Abraham is said to have stayed here for some time, during his journey from Ur to Canaan. It flourished as a centre of learning, especially under the Arabs, who built a great mosque and university here in the 8th century, making it the earliest mosque in Anatolia. The unusual beehive-style houses of Harran are perhaps the most interesting features of Harran. They have been built like this since the 3rd century BC and constructed entirely without wood. The design of these makes them cool inside (essential in this part of the world) and is thought to have been unchanged for at least 3,000 years. We continue to Mardin and its history reads like a who's-who of conquest. The Assyrians, Arabs, Seljuk Dynasties, Kurdish, Persians, Mongols and Ottomans have all played a game of rule here. Today, this town of old stone houses spread out below a cliff ridge in a tumble of labyrinthine alleyways, has become something of tourism hot spot. With its wealth of historic buildings (some now converted into boutique hotels), Mardin's timeless allure is attracting a brand-new batch of visitors who soak up the cultural heritage by sightseeing rather than invading and conquering. In the afternoon we visit the Deyrul Zafaran (Deir az Zafaran) - the "Saffron Monastery," so named from the yellowish stone from which it is built. This Syrian-Orthodox Christian monastery is 7 kms east of Mardin and was founded in 493 AD. It was the seat of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch from 1160 until the 1920's (now in Damascus). Today it is attended to by only 2 monks who run a school for orphans. The monastery complex contains three churches, which adjoin the rear facade of the arcaded courtyard, all surrounded by high fortress-like walls. Don't miss the underground sanctuary chamber and the chapel's side-room with its 300-year-old wooden throne and floor mosaics. The patriarch of the Syrian-Orthodox Church moved his residence here in 1160 when he and his followers were driven out of Antioch (modern Antakya). Dinner tonight will be in a small local restaurant in the old town, not far from our hotel.

 **4 HOURS**

 **HOTEL IZALA, MARDIN, TURKEY**

DAY 8

Mardin - Hasankeyf - Tatvan

Today we leave Mardin and drive about 110 kms northeast to Hasankeyf.

This atmospheric village is cut in two by the Tigris River. The Romans established the town as a border post with the Persians and named it Cephe. Under Byzantine rule the town prospered, but its hey-day came to an end with the invasions of the Artukids, Ayyubids and later, the Mongols. Four arches, which are picturesquely sticking out of the river, are all that remain of the original grand bridge across the Tigris.

Up on the cliff ridge above (where you can get great photos of the river), the castle sits surrounded by cave dwellings. The Romans incarcerated the Parthian King Arshak here - tying him with silver chains to the stuffed corpse of his general, Varsak, until he died.

A dam project has put Hasankeyf's future under threat since the and since its opening in 2016 some of Hasankeyf is now under water.

Lunch will be with a local family and then we have time to explore and walk for about 2 and a 1/2 hours with a local guide.

We continue and drive the remaining distance to Tatvan where we stay in a recently opened new hotel with a great roof terrace.

 **2 1/2 HOURS**

 **HOTEL CRATER, TATVAN, TURKEY**



DAY 9

Mount Nemrut Crater Lake - Walk Around Ahlat – Tatvan

This morning we drive to Mt. Nemrut, a great volcanic mountain with amazing lake scenes. The mountain rises from the southwestern shore of Lake Van and enters the district of Ahlat to the north.

It is 3,050 metres high and its elliptic caldera has a diameter of about 7 x 8 kms. The western part of the caldera contains a large cold-water crater lake about 155 metres deep. Along our walk we also pass the so-called “small warm lake” whose temperature reaches 60°C, providing evidence of continuing volcanic activity.

We stop at Lake Nemrut for lunch and can't get enough of this amazing scenery.

Here we join our bus and drive the short distance to Ahlat where we walk from the village to a bird sanctuary. Along the way we have magnificent views back to Mt Nemrut and can admire many of the amazing Seljuk tombstone carvings and mausoleums from the 12th and 13th centuries, which have been found here.

Dinner tonight will be at your leisure.

 **4 HOURS**

 **HOTEL CRATER, TATVAN, TURKEY**



DAY 10

Akdamar Island - Lunch - Visit Silver Manufactory And Shop - Van Cats

This morning we leave our comfortable hotel and take a pleasant boat ride on Lake Van. It is the largest lake in Turkey and the largest soda lake in the world -- phenomena created by the high alkalinity of its waters. Located 1,750 metres above sea level, with a maximum depth of 450 metres, the lake was created millions of years ago, when lava flows from nearby Mt. Nemrut blocked the basin's outlet.

From Tatvan, we will take a 20-minute boat ride out to Akdamar Island, where stands the 10th century Armenian Church of the Holy Cross. Its beautiful location, 2 kms off-shore, has infused it with a tranquil and sacred aura; a monastic settlement since the 6th century, it was also at one time the seat of the Armenian patriarch and the sacred burial ground of saints. Akdamar church is also considered one of the masterpieces of Armenian art and architecture. We will see the remnants of its medieval frescoes inside and weathered stone reliefs by Armenian master carvers on the exterior walls of the church, which are extremely beautiful. These reliefs depict Biblical scenes with Adam, Eve, Abraham, David and Goliath and Jesus as well as earthly themes, such as life in the palace, hunting scenes and human and animal figures. A remarkable design of vines interspersed with animals carved in high relief encircles the exterior of the church. The manner in which these themes are worked, show an influence of 9th and 10th century Abbasi art.

On the island we climb up to the highest point, which has magnificent views of Lake Van and all the surrounding mountains.

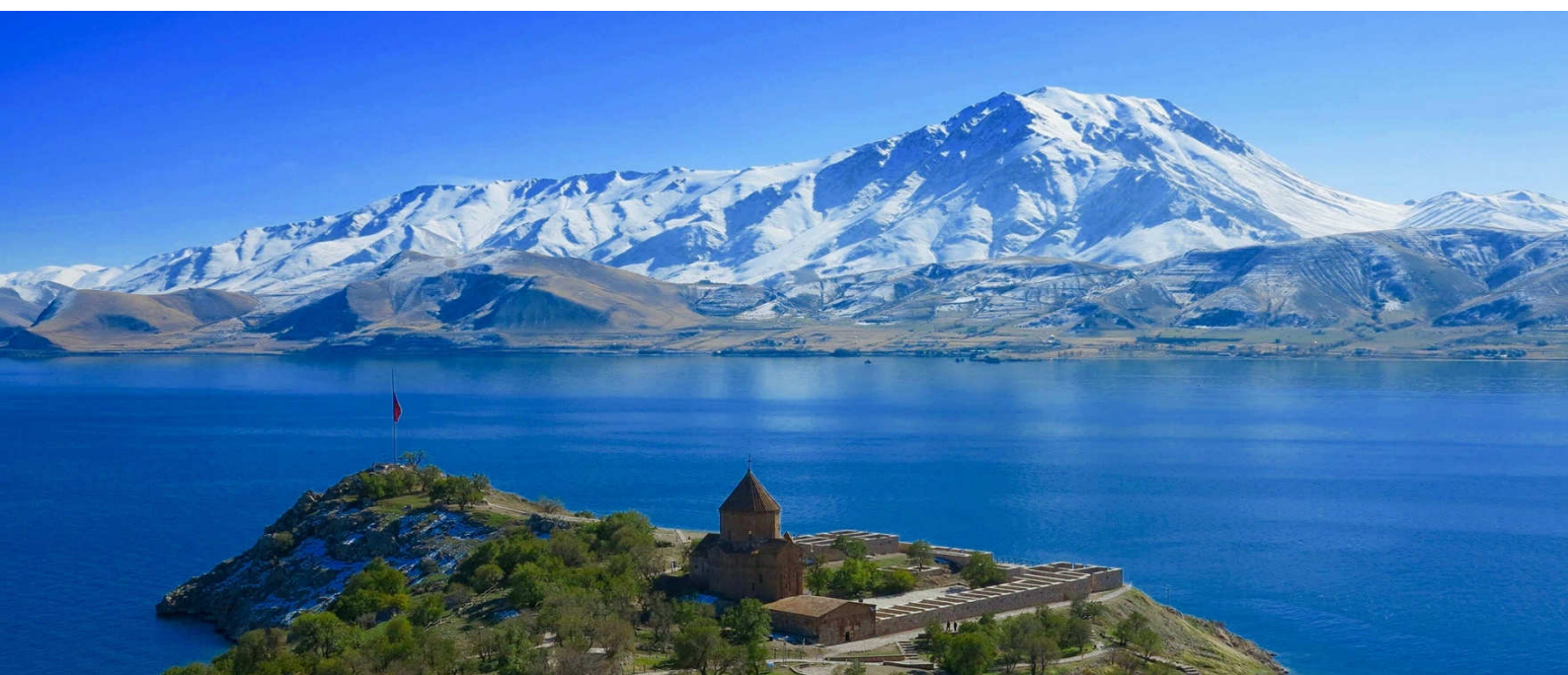
We return to the shore and drive the short distance to Van where we have lunch with a local family and learn about the specialities in the eastern Turkish cuisine. We spend the rest of the afternoon exploring Van, the capital of the ancient Urartian Empire, whose realm once stretched into modern Iran, Iraq and Syria. The Urartian civilization, the biblical kingdom of Ararat, flourished from the 13th-7th centuries BCE. After their decline in the 7th century, people whom the Persians called Armenians settled in the area and remained there until the 20th century. The Urartians were skilled citadel builders, metal workers and jewellers - their jewellery and bronze cauldrons have been found as far as Greece. We will see their beautiful gold and bronze work in one of the

workshops, manufacturing and selling niello jewellery, Urartian necklaces, earrings, rings etc. We might also come across one or two of the famous Van cats, known for their long, white fur and multi coloured eyes.

From here it is only a short drive to our hotel, which is directly at Lake Van.

 **1 ½ HOURS**

 **HOTEL MERIT, VAN, TURKEY**



DAY 11

Van - Dogubayazit - İshak Paşa Sarayı, Crater Hole, Noah's Arche – Kars

We have an early departure from Van and drive into the region of Mt. Ararat, the highest mountain in Turkey (5,165 metres) and steeped in religious tradition throughout the near east since antiquity. According to Genesis 8:4, Mt. Ararat was the final resting place of Noah's Ark once the waters of the great flood had receded. The Armenians believed that their race descended from its slopes, the Arabs considered it the "roof of the world" from which the life-giving Tigris and Euphrates rivers originated. Passing by Caldiran, we pass through a vast lava field created from previous eruptions - the last eruption of Ararat having taken place in 1840. If it is a clear day, the majesty of the two peaks of Ararat will come into view. Rising abruptly from the surrounding flood plain, there is little wonder why it has captured the imagination of pilgrims, travellers and explorers for centuries.

En-route, we will visit Ishak Pasa Sarayı, an incredible palace built in the 17th century by a Cildiroglu chieftain and finished by Ishak Pasa in the 1784. Whether these rulers were of Armenian, Kurdish or Georgian descent is unclear, however, the palace is an amalgam of Armenian, Persian, Georgian, Seljuk and Ottoman styles. It has been described as a "magnificent anachronism" commemorating the "ambitious taste of a cultivated rich family of robber-barons". The strategic location of the palace was recognized since Urartian times when a fortress was built here (the ruins are visible from the palace); both the Seljuks and Ottomans built castles here to control the caravan traffic on the Silk Route. Inside we will see the mosque, the Selamlık, the public quarters; the Haremlik - living quarters with 14 rooms equipped with fireplaces and water channels; the kitchen and tomb of Ishak Pasa and his wife. We descend from the palace to Dogubeyazit - a frontier town only 35 kms from the Iranian border. Dogubeyazit is predominantly a Kurdish town, which prides itself on its strong Kurdish heritage.

Back in town we buy a picnic and drive to the look out of Noah's Ark, which is perfect to have our lunch while observing what is thought to be Noah's Ark - a ship-like soil pile just below us. American Academics apparently confirmed that it is Noah's Ark.

Now it is high time to leave and to continue our journey into the heart of ancient Armenia to Kars, the former capital of Armenia and once the seat of the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate. En route, we will pass some beautiful landscapes and Kurdish villages in the countryside.

Our hotel is in the city centre and located in a historic building.

 **2 HOURS**

 **KAR'S HOTEL, KARS, TURKEY**



DAY 12

Drive to Bogaz Koy Village - Cooking Class - Walk back to Kars

After breakfast we drive to the village of Bogaz Koy, a typical Malakan village. The Malakans, with their Russian origins are especially known for their stance against war. This community that opposes the authority of the church and reverends and who still try to sustain their lives without any device as was in the emerging years of Christianity, was compelled to migrate earlier. Thus, Malakans, who migrated to Kars as well as many other countries, have conveyed their cultural background to these lands. Undoubtedly, the most significant element of Kars's cuisine is the goose culture, which has lived as a ritual. Goose, which is preserved after drying especially in winter months as a consequence of harsh geographic and climatic conditions, has been an indispensable nutritional source for the region's inhabitants for hundreds of years. Besides dried goose, we can list other local tastes of the region as dried nettle soup, strained rice with raisin, piti kebab, stuffed apple, hengel (Turkish ravioli), basil and water heurek.

Today we are guests of Saban and his family for an insight into the local culture and a taste of the traditional cuisine. They live in a one hundred-year old farmhouse that was built by Saban's grandfather. The kitchen is in a different attached building and outside we can see the usual farm buildings, very close to the house. We spend the rest of the morning preparing our lunch and soon will be rewarded with a sensation of flavours.

After lunch we follow the Malakan trail along the river back to the citadel in Kars.

 **5 HOURS**

 **KAR'S HOTEL, KARS, TURKEY**

DAY 13

Kars - Morning Free - Visit of Ani Ruins - Boga Tepe - Cheese Museum (Dinner)

This morning you have time to explore Kars at your leisure. After the Azeri, Turcomen, Kurdish, and Turkish influences on Kars's culture, the Russians certainly left a distinctive mark on the city's design and architecture during their occupation, 1878–1920. Well worth seeing the ethnographic exhibitions of local handicrafts, implements, jewellery, carpets and artefacts from the departed Russian and Armenian culture in the Kars Museum. Another interesting monument is Kümbet Mosque, formerly the Church of the Apostles. We meet again after lunch and we drive the short distance to Ani, often called the "City of 1,000 Churches". It is perhaps the most moving site in Eastern Turkey because of its spectacular location, melancholy ambience and monumental medieval architecture of red and black stone. Ani sits on a triangular plateau on the Arpa Cayi (Ahuryan or Araxis) River, the modern border between Turkey and Armenia. Armenian King Ashot III of the Bagratid dynasty moved the capital from Kars to Ani in the 10th century; at its zenith, it once rivalled the great cities of Constantinople and Baghdad. Having suffered numerous invasions by the Byzantines, Selcuks, and Mongols, the city was finally abandoned after the devastating earthquake of 1319, never to be reoccupied. Today we walk through the empty walled city and enter the ruined churches, many of which still display their original frescoes. These include the Church of the Holy Redeemer, the Church of the Holy Apostles, converted into a caravansary by the Selcuks, the Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the patron saint of the Armenians; and the extraordinary Cathedral, designed by Trdat Mendet, the same architect who restored the dome of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople in 989. Later in the afternoon we travel to Boğatepe, a cluster of buildings flanking two intersecting dirt roads located a short drive from Kars. Here we meet up with İlhan who was born in the village. It was founded in 1878 when the horse-drawn tram linking Kars to Tblisi was inaugurated. The following year, David Moser, a Swiss cheese producer, stopped in the town and was struck by the terrain and expansive pastures. He established a small cheese factory in the village and soon, Gruyere production was Boğatepe's main industry. Locally, this high-fat cow's milk cheese is called gravyer. During our visit of the UNESCO supported cheese museum, İlhan will explain the process of gravyer production and aging. The process is supremely physical, employing lots of leverage,

five men and all the body weight they can muster. The first step begins in the fields. Boğatepe's hundreds of indigenous plants like stinging nettle, mallow, chives, chamomile and greater burdock and the water's mineral content, produce a distinctly flavoured milk. At the end of our visit we enjoy dinner with a local family before returning to Kars and our hotel.

 **3 HOURS**

 **KAR'S HOTEL, KARS, TURKEY**



DAY 14

Kars - Cilder Lake Island Walk - Satan's Castle – Şavşat

Today we leave our cosy hotel in Kas and drive to Lake Çıldır (Lake of Shadows), which is tucked up in the far northeast of Turkey where the borders rub up against Georgia and Armenia. There cannot be more beautiful spots than this than in early summer when the surrounding slopes are emerald-green and the rocks are peppered with wildflowers.

Lake Çıldır sits at an elevation of almost 2,000 metres and in winter the lake freezes over and the landscape becomes a panorama of white. It's an intensely arable area and the landscape around here reminds us of some of the remote Scottish lochs. We frequently encounter huge herds of cows and flocks of sheep crossing the road. Like in Kars, many people rear geese to be eaten in winter and you'll see mainly elderly people herding the birds from place to place.

In Akçakale we walk across the bridge and onto the small green island of Ada Şehri, tenuously attached to the mainland. Here we eye up the even more forlorn remains of a chapel.

We stop for lunch in the pleasant restaurant, Atalay'ın Yeri, right beside the water where we can eat trout. It's worth coming here just to see on its walls a prize-winning photograph that hints at the real secret of the lake -- which is that it's at its very best not in early summer when the surrounding fields are full of wildflowers but in the depths of winter when the whole lake freezes over and the locals hold a festival involving horse races across the ice and fun runs in horse-drawn klips.

After lunch we continue the short distance to the tiny village of Yıldırımtepe to walk to Şeytan Kalesi - Devil's Castle. It is one of those extraordinary castles that defy anyone to work out how or why it was ever built. On a pinnacle of rock inside a dramatic ravine overlooking the Başköy river, the castle looks as if it has come straight out of a Hollywood film set, a Disney fantasy of a medieval castle and virtually inaccessible. We follow a very small road high above the glorious Başköy Gorge and then follow the path along the side, which will take us to the castle.

Surely one of Turkey's remote castles, Şeytan Kalesi, makes a stunning sight but optional to visit - there is a viewing platform from where it is possible to observe the castle from some distance. The keep and a tower that is surprisingly intact are perched on rocks in the middle of this craggy and seemingly impenetrable gorge; one can only wonder what supposed enemies were expected to be able to approach it. The castle is a reminder of the period from the 13th to the 18th centuries when this part

of the country was ruled by a Georgian dynasty that had broken away from the main kingdom and whose leaders eventually converted to Islam. Their writ once ran on both sides of what is now the Turkish–Georgian border.

After our visit we return to our bus and drive to our hotel in Savsat in the Black Sea Mountains. We cross over the Yalnızçam Pass, at 2,200 metres, the last of the mountain passes that join the lush valleys of the Black Sea with the desolate highlands of the interior. Arguably, it is also the most spectacular. Located 14 kms under the pass on the Artvin side, our hotel Laşet is the perfect place to stop. Although very simple, it is by far the best place to stay and visit this spectacular

region. It is surrounded by meadows of wild-flowers and butterflies, rushing streams and quaint chalets. The local womens' organization has established a training centre for weaving in an attempt to keep the indigenous carpet and kilim traditions alive. The grill-and-raki restaurant is reputed as the best in the area.

The name refers to a mineral water source nearby; it apparently means "bitter water" in the local Georgian dialect.

 **3 HOURS**

 **HOTEL LAŞET, ŞAVŞAT, TURKEY**



DAY 15

Walk From Karagöl To Velikoy

Today we drive high up to Lake Karagöl (Black Lake) which is deeply hidden in the mountains and not far from the Georgian border. The lake is surrounded by thick fir forest purportedly full of bears and deer although we are more likely to see wagtails, woodpeckers, jays, ravens and butterflies. Apparently in autumn the bears steal the fruit from the orchards in the little villages.

The lake is in the Karagöl-Sahara National Park in the Şavşat district of Artvin Province in Turkey. Located in the Black Sea region, it is formed by two separate areas, namely Karagöl and the Sahara plateau. The pastures are so green here that it feels more like walking in the Swiss Alps. An amazing variety of wildflowers invades this region in summer, covering the hills in fantastic blankets of pink, purple and azure. We skirt the path around the lake and then stop at the friendly guest house for morning tea.

From here we continue along the track and in to the forest. As we start our descent, we pass centuries-old wooden houses with pretty balconies. The houses, dotted over hills in amongst perfectly paved roads and lush green fields, make it almost seem surreal. It all is very neat and manicured, like the set of a blockbuster film and a relief that the area is protected by the government because it would be heart-breaking to see it disappear because of overzealous developers. Our walk ends in Velikoy, another typical authentic village.

 **5 HOURS**

 **HOTEL LASET, ŞAVŞAT, TURKEY**



DAY 16

Walk from Pinarli Village to Fish Lake And Karagöl

The Kaçkar is a compact and beautiful mountainous region and the mountains rise from the sea or the Çoruh Valley to approaching 4,000 metres. The summits are bare granite but the slopes hide tiny mountain lakes and below them lush fir and pine forests clothe the hillsides.

Today we drive the short distance to the isolated village of Pinarli from where we start our walk. Small lakes don't appear on maps. These natural wonders can only be discovered by talking with people who live in the area - Fish Lake - our goal for today - is one of them. We leave Pinarli and the road disintegrates quickly into a 4WD track, which switchbacks up onto grassy slopes and into the mountains. We make our ascent into a secret world - first a row of summerhouses, then flowery streamside paths through forests of tall dark fir framing the hills. For a while we wonder whether the pictures we have seen of the lake must be a Fata Morgana... then suddenly the track opens out and we gaze down into a deep pool of dark blue water - its shores highlighted with patches of red, purple and white rhododendrons.

From the lake we continue our walk through thick fir forests and then skirting along the base of the mountains to the village of Karagöl where we re-join our bus.

On our way back to the hotel we divert to Cevizli village and inspect the striking ruins of the 10th-century Georgian Tbeti church, across the road from some glorious examples of the elaborate wooden chalets that once graced most of the surrounding villages. The church remained intact and abandoned until the early 60s when some locals got it in their head that the Georgians had hidden gold in these churches. So Tbeti and most of the other medieval Georgian churches in this area were dynamited. No gold was found, of course but the ruins are still impressive. We can see the building was made to last and good portions of the transepts are still standing along with the apse... one can only imagine what it was like before.

 **5 HOURS**

 **HOTEL LASET, ŞAVŞAT, TURKEY**

DAY 17

Şavşat - Teagardens - Trabzon - End Of Tour

On our last day we have an amazing drive through the mountains. We pass through Rize, the main tea-growing area of the country and time permitting we visit one of the tea plantations. Tea, the staple drink of Turkey, had been imported until the 1930's, when plantations had been introduced to the region (for which the climate is ideal). At the time, it filled the economic vacuum left when the Pontic Greek population was evacuated after the War of Independence. Green crops of tea cover the slopes well beyond the city.

We stop for lunch at the coast of the Black Sea and then continue to Trabzon where the tour ends at approximately 4 p.m. at:

GRAND HOTEL ZORLU

TRABZON

Ph +90 462 326 8400

www.zorlugrand.com



Journey Accommodation

Kayakapi Premium Caves, Cappadocia

NIGHT 1 - 3



Hotel Euphrat Nemrut, Kaaradut

NIGHT 4



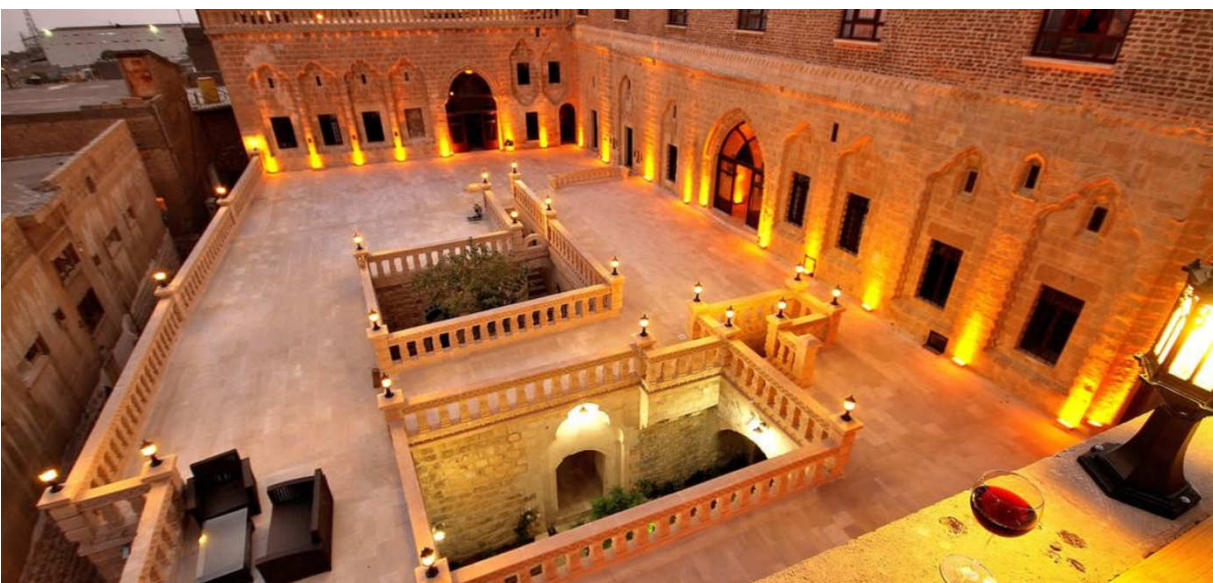
Manici Hotel, Sanliurfa

NIGHT 5 - 6



Hotel Izala, Mardin

NIGHT 7



Hotel Crater, Tatvan

NIGHT 8 - 9



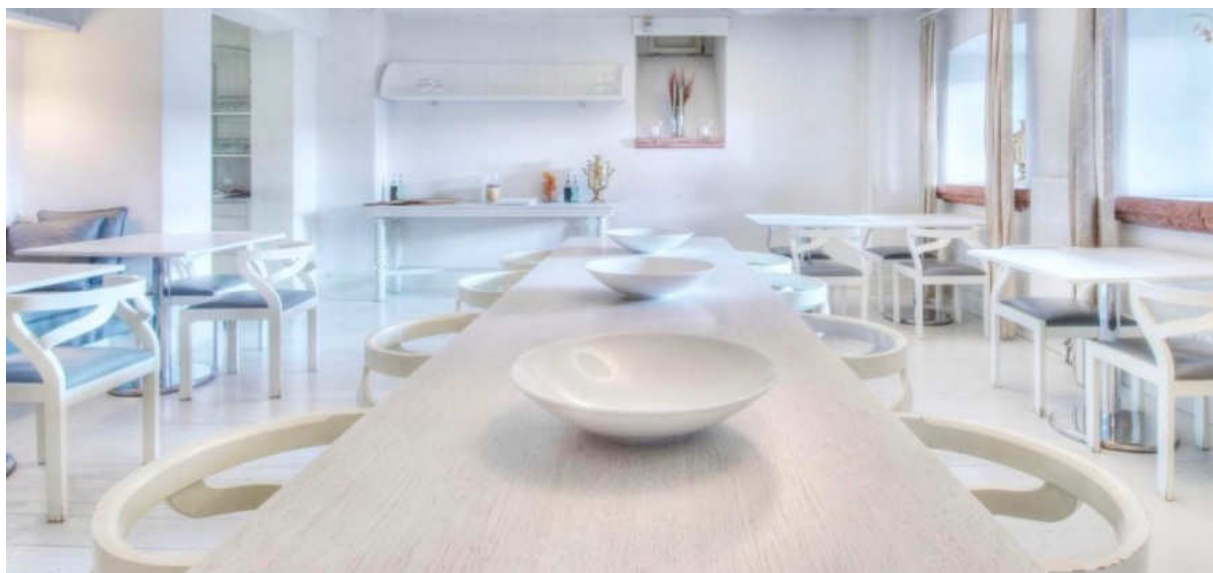
Hotel Merit, Van

NIGHT 10



Kar's Hotel, Kars

NIGHT 11 - 13



Hotel Laset, Şavşat

NIGHT 14 - 16



Journey Notes

TOUR INCLUDES

- Experienced guides.
- Pick up at Hotel Raddison in Kayseri on Day 1 and drop off at Grand Hotel Zorlu in Trabzon on Day 17.
- Price includes transport between Kayseri on Day 1 and Trabzon on Day 17 and all entry fees.
- Twin share accommodation from Day 1 to Day 16 including breakfast (16), lunches (3) and dinners (14).
- All ferry charges.

NOT INCLUDED IN TRIP COSTS

Transport before and after “the walk”, lunch, and 2 dinners on the free evenings, evening drinks, in-between meal snacks, personal travel insurance, personal clothing, laundry, medical expenses and items of personal nature.

WHAT TO BRING

Daypack, walking boots, sun hat, sunglasses, sun-cream, bathers, waterproof raincoat. Walking sticks and walking sandals might be handy for some days. As we are restricted with the amount of luggage we can carry in our vehicles please ensure that your CASES DO NOT EXCEED 20 KG's per guest!

PRE-WALK PREPARATION

We suggest that prior to your walking holiday you prepare yourself to obtain a level of fitness that will allow you to enjoy your walking holiday.

This, of course, is dependent upon your existing fitness level. Remember, the fitter you are, the more you will enjoy the holiday!

- Start with some short walks which include stairs or hills and increase the length of walks over a couple of months.
- We suggest you carry a backpack with water, camera, jacket, snacks, etc. to assist you with your preparation and allow you to get used to the extra weight on your back.

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- We also ask that your boots are comfortable and well worn in.
 - Perhaps enjoy some walks through our local national parks and over uneven surfaces to gain confidence with your boots or new walking shoes.

PLEASE NOTE

All accommodation on tour includes private facilities (toilet and shower/bath). Single rooms can be arranged for this tour for a supplement.

Please ask for details. We will endeavour to match people together if they would like to share a twin room with another guest to avoid paying the single room supplement. However, as this is not always possible, 'single' clients will have to pay the supplement.

All walks during the 15-Day tour are optional or can be taken in parts. Guests can choose to have more free days than the two already included in the itinerary.

The walking pace on the walks is leisurely. Guests do not have to be experienced, although a good level of fitness is necessary.



Get in touch and book your journey today.

 0461 277 612

 info@walkaboutgourmet.com

Follow the journey.



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