

Full Itinerary

TURKISH DELIGHTS: AN ADVENTURE



TALK TO OUR WELL
TRAVELLED TEAM OF
EXPERTS

0844 3350 197

Monday to Friday 09:00 - 18:00
GMT



JOURNEY SNAPSHOT

ACTIVITY LEVEL:

Level 2

DESTINATION:

Turkish Delights: An Adventure

DURATION:

12 days / 11 nights

FLIGHT INFORMATION:

Please arrange your flights to arrive into Istanbul Airport [IST] on Day 1 and to depart from there on Day 12

PICKUP LOCATION:

Istanbul Airport [IST]

OVERVIEW

13 - 24 May, 2025

Discover the ancient civilizations of Turkey, walk in the footsteps of Sultans, and explore the Turkish delights of Istanbul and Bodrum.

Turkey is a captivating bridge between the cultures of Europe to the West and Asia to the East. Nestled in the heart of the eastern Mediterranean, it offers a rich tapestry of history, stunning landscapes, and vibrant culture. From the bustling streets of Istanbul to the serene shores of the Aegean Sea, from the ancient wonders of Ephesus to the cosmopolitan charm of Bodrum and Marmaris, this journey through Turkey offers an unforgettable adventure.

Begin your experience in Istanbul, a city where history and modernity exist side by side, offering a fascinating glimpse into the past and present. Then, embark on a 7-day cruise along the Mediterranean coast aboard a traditional Turkish sailing boat. Explore hidden coves, charming fishing villages, and ancient ruins as you sail through these historic waters. Enjoy time to swim, relax, and discover more about the rich heritage of these ancient trading hubs.

Visit the Imperial Residences of the Sultans, wander through the ancient city of Ephesus, and cruise across the glittering blue seas. Indulge in local flavors and hospitality that have made Turkey a cultural melting pot of rich history, diverse religions, and exceptional cuisine. There is truly no better way to experience the beauty and depth of Turkey's unique heritage.

ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAY 1 - Welcome to Istanbul - Gateway to the East

DAY 2 - Exploring Istanbul

DAY 3 - Exploring Ottoman Splendor and Bosphorus Beauty

DAY 4 - Flight to Izmir

DAY 5 - Discovering the Ancient Treasures of Pergamon

DAY 6 - Drive to Pamukkale

DAY 7 - The Wonders of Pamukkale, Hierapolis & Laodicea

DAY 8 - Discovering Aphrodisias & Kusadasi with Optional Bike Tour

DAY 9 - Exploring Ephesus & Optional Cooking Class

DAY 10 - Aegean Serenity: A Day of Luxury on the Water

DAY 11 - Back to Istanbul

DAY 12 - Farewell to Turkey

FULL ITINERARY

DAY 1 - WELCOME TO ISTANBUL - GATEWAY TO THE EAST

Upon arrival at Istanbul Airport, you will be met and transferred to your hotel.

After relaxing into your hotel, join together this evening with your Big Journey Company Tour Director for dinner and to meet the rest of your tour group.

Included meals: Dinner

Accommodation: Istanbul

DAY 2 - EXPLORING ISTANBUL

Today we enjoy a city tour of Istanbul, taking in some of the most spectacular sites the ancient city has to offer.

We'll begin with a visit to the Aya Sofya Mosque, originally built as the Church of St. Sophia in the 6th century by Emperor Justinian. This architectural masterpiece stands as a testament to the former Byzantine capital's grandeur and has influenced medieval architecture for centuries. Its design is said to reflect the mirror image of the heavens.

Next, we'll explore the Hippodrome, the ancient stadium of Byzantium that once held 100,000 spectators. We'll see relics from across the empire, including the Egyptian obelisk and the iconic bronze sculpture of three entwined serpents from Delphi.

We'll continue to the stunning Blue Mosque, one of the world's most significant places of worship. Known for its blue Iznik tile work, the mosque's grand dome and six minarets are visible from every corner of Sultanahmet.

Afterwards, we'll visit the magnificent Topkapi Palace, the former imperial residence of 25 Ottoman Sultans. We'll explore the library, royal treasure including the famous Spoonmaker's diamond, and the imperial living quarters, all surrounded by serene gardens and fountains. While in the palace, we'll step back in time to experience 500 years of Ottoman history, a unique blend of influences from Central Asia, Asia Minor, Persia, and Mesopotamia.

We'll conclude our day with a visit to the world-famous Grand Bazaar, a vibrant market in operation since 1461. With over 4,000 shops and more than 20,000 people employed, it's a bustling hub of culture and commerce. From gold and silver jewelry to carpets, antiques, and leather goods, the Grand Bazaar offers an array of treasures.

After a full day of exploration, we'll return to the tour hotel, and the rest of the evening will be free for you to enjoy at your leisure.

Included meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Accommodation: Istanbul

DAY 3 - EXPLORING OTTOMAN SPLENDOR AND BOSPHORUS BEAUTY

After breakfast, we will head out to explore some of Istanbul's most iconic landmarks. Our first stop will be the Suleymaniye Mosque, one of Istanbul's architectural masterpieces. Designed by the renowned architect Sinan in the 1550s, this majestic structure is a prime example of classical Ottoman architecture. We will learn that the mosque is part of a larger complex built for Sultan Suleyman, providing us with a fascinating glimpse into Ottoman history and design.

Next, we will visit the Byzantine Underground Cistern, built in the 6th century under Emperor Justinian. This extraordinary subterranean water reservoir is one of Istanbul's most unique tourist attractions, with its dramatic atmosphere and impressive columns.

Afterward, we will head to the Old Spice Market, a vibrant marketplace where we can explore a vast array of spices, herbs, oils, henna, and, of course, the world's best Turkish delight.

We will then embark on a scenic cruise along the Bosphorus, offering us panoramic views of Istanbul and its surrounding landscapes. The Bosphorus Strait, which connects the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea, stretches approximately 16 miles, with lush shores lined by the homes of Istanbul's wealthiest residents.

After the cruise, we will disembark on the European Side of the city and visit a local café for a Baklava tasting paired with traditional Turkish coffee. We'll indulge in this delicious dessert, made with the finest ingredients by expert bakers, and experience one of Turkey's most beloved

treats.

At the end of the tour, we will transfer back to our hotel, where the rest of the evening will be at our leisure.

Included meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Accommodation: Istanbul

Optional extras: Traditional Felt Making Workshop: For those interested in a hands-on experience, we offer an optional Felt Making Workshop with a Master Craftsman. In this two-hour workshop, we will learn about one of the oldest textile crafts, dating back to the 4th and 5th centuries BC. We'll discover the traditional techniques of felting used by Turkish nomadic tribes, still practiced today in Central Asia and East Asia for making rugs, tents, and clothing.

DAY 4 - FLIGHT TO IZMIR

This morning, we check out of our hotel and transfer to Istanbul Airport for our flight down the coast to Izmir.

On arrival at Izmir begin our exploration of the city. Our first stop will be Kordon, the beautiful waterfront promenade offering stunning views of the Aegean Sea. It's the perfect spot to take in the scenic beauty of the coastline.

Next, we will visit the Agora of Smyrna, an ancient marketplace located in the heart of Izmir. Dating back to the Hellenistic period, the Agora offers a fascinating glimpse into the past, with its well-preserved columns, inscriptions, and ruins that tell the story of this ancient city.

We will then head to the Izmir Archaeology Museum, located just a short distance from the Agora. The museum features a vast collection of artifacts that highlight the city's rich history, including significant pieces from ancient Smyrna.

We will stroll through Konak Square, home to the iconic Clock Tower, a symbol of the city. After taking in the sights and enjoying the atmosphere of the square, we will be transferred to our hotel to check in and spend an evening on your own.

Included meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Accommodation: Bodrum

DAY 5 - DISCOVERING THE ANCIENT TREASURES OF PERGAMON

This morning, we begin the day with a visit to the Acropolis of Pergamon, the ancient city's most iconic site. Here, we'll explore the impressive ruins, including the Temple of Trajan, the Library of Pergamon, and the Altar of Zeus, which was once one of the most magnificent structures in the ancient world. We'll take a walk through the Hellenistic Theater, one of the steepest of its kind, offering breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.

Next, we will head down to the Asklepion, the famous ancient medical center dedicated to Asclepius, the Greek god of healing. We'll walk along the Via Tecta, the sacred road that once led pilgrims to the sanctuary. Inside, we'll discover the remains of the sacred spring, underground tunnels used for healing rituals, and treatment rooms where ancient physicians practiced innovative medical techniques. This peaceful site offers fascinating insight into early medicine and holistic healing practices.

Afterward, we'll visit the Red Basilica, a massive red-brick temple originally built for the worship of Egyptian gods. Over time, it was transformed into a Byzantine church, creating an intriguing blend of architectural styles.

We'll also stop by the Pergamon Museum to see additional artifacts, before taking a leisurely walk through the town.

Included meals: Breakfast & Lunch

DAY 6 - DRIVE TO PAMUKKALE

This morning, we will depart from Izmir and begin our drive to Pamukkale.

Our first stop will be Sardis, the ancient capital of Lydia, where we will explore the Temple of Artemis. Once one of the largest temples in the ancient world, this grand structure stands as a testament to Sardis' former wealth and power.

Nearby, we will visit the Gymnasium and Bath Complex, a Roman-era marvel featuring beautifully restored columns and intricate mosaics. The adjacent Jewish Synagogue, one of the largest of its time, offers a fascinating glimpse into the diverse cultural and religious life of ancient Sardis.

After exploring Sardis, we will continue to Philadelphia (modern-day Alasehir). Though little remains of the ancient city, we will visit the ruins of St. John's Church, one of the Seven Churches of Revelation. Here, we'll see several standing Byzantine columns that hint at the site's former grandeur. As we stroll through the town, we can also appreciate the beauty of the surrounding region.

Afterward, we will continue our journey to Pamukkale and settle in for the evening.

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 7 - THE WONDERS OF PAMUKKALE, HIERAPOLIS & LAODICEA

Today, we will explore Pamukkale and Hierapolis, both of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The ancient city of Hierapolis, located near Pamukkale in Denizli, was founded in 190 B.C. by Eumenes II, the king of Pergamon. During the 2nd and 3rd centuries, it became a major Roman thermal bath center. The city was built around a subterranean cavern, known as a Plutonium, which served as a religious center from the Hellenistic era.

Pamukkale, meaning "cotton castle" in Turkish, is one of Turkey's top attractions, famous for its stunning cotton-like terraces. The underground water that once sustained the ancient city of Hierapolis now helps Pamukkale remain one of the country's most important thermal centers. People come from all over to enjoy the healing properties of the waters, which are scientifically proven to cure many ailments. In ancient times, religious and other significant buildings were often constructed near hot or cold water sources.

We will then visit Laodicea, an ancient city renowned for its wealth and early Christian significance. We will begin by exploring the main streets, where the remains of columns, shops, and public buildings offer a glimpse into the thriving trade center it once was. Walking along Syria Street, one of the city's major roads, we will get an insight into Roman daily life.

Next, we will visit the two theaters of Laodicea, unique for their close proximity to each other. The Western Theater, partially restored, provides fantastic views over the ruins, while the Eastern Theater, though less intact, showcases the city's large population and cultural influence. Nearby, we will explore the Stadium and Gymnasium Complex, once used for athletic competitions and public gatherings.

We will then visit the Laodicea Church, one of the oldest known Christian churches and believed to be one of the Seven Churches of Revelation mentioned in the Bible. The remains of the large basilica feature intricate columns and floor mosaics, reflecting the early Christian community that once thrived here.

Our day will conclude with a visit to the Temple of Zeus and the Water Distribution Center. From this point, we will enjoy panoramic views of the surrounding landscape before returning to our hotel.

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 8 - DISCOVERING APHRODISIAS & KUSADASI WITH OPTIONAL BIKE TOUR

After breakfast, we will drive approximately 1.5 hours to Aphrodisias, one of Turkey's most impressive and well-preserved archaeological sites. Here, we will explore the remains of a theater, a grand stadium, a monumental gate, the Temple of Aphrodite, and a remarkable Archaeological Museum. Aphrodisias is renowned for its beauty and the incredible efforts made in its excavation and restoration by New York University. We will discover why the Roman Emperor Augustus chose this city as his personal favorite, famously declaring, "Of all the cities in Asia, I choose this one for myself."

We will explore the city dedicated to the goddess of love, including the Temple of Aphrodite and one of the finest ancient stadiums ever built, while learning about the city's significant role in the development of sculpture during the Roman Empire.

In the afternoon, we will continue our journey to Kusadasi and check in to our hotel. The rest of the day will be at leisure.

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Optional extras: Morning Bike Tour 8:30 AM – Pick up from the hotel 9:30 AM – 11:30 AM – Cycling tour through Güzelçamlı National Park (15 miles) 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM – Hiking in the canyon (1 hour) 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM – Lunch at the beach with grilled specialties or Turkish pizza, followed by swimming in the coves 4:00 PM – Transfer to Kusadasi.

DAY 9 - EXPLORING EPHEBUS & OPTIONAL COOKING CLASS

Today, we will visit the ancient city of Ephesus (UNESCO World Heritage Site), one of the most stunning and well-preserved archaeological sites in the world. This remarkable city, once a Greek trading hub and later a Roman provincial capital, was home to one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: the Temple of Artemis. Though only the foundations remain, it offers an insight into the grandeur of the past.

We will begin with a visit to the breathtaking Library of Celsus, built in the 2nd century AD, with its impressive columns and façade. We'll continue to the Grand Theater, where St. Paul once preached, and marvel at its ability to hold 24,000 spectators. As we walk the ancient streets of Ephesus, we will encounter a wealth of history and architecture, making this a truly memorable experience.

Next, we will visit the House of the Virgin Mary on Mount Koressos. This peaceful pilgrimage site is believed to be the final home of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and attracts visitors from around the world.

Afterward, we'll explore the remnants of the Temple of Artemis, once one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Optional extras: Cooking Class: For those interested in a culinary experience, join us for an immersive cooking class in Kusadasi. We'll visit a local market, hand-picking fresh ingredients for a hands-on session in a charming kitchen. You'll learn to prepare traditional Turkish dishes, from mezes to savory pastries and main courses. Afterward, we'll enjoy the fruits of our labor with local wines or refreshing drinks.

DAY 10 - AEGEAN SERENITY: A DAY OF LUXURY ON THE WATER

In the morning, we will embark on a scenic boat cruise through the crystal-clear waters of the Aegean Sea. Along the way, we'll stop at stunning bays and hidden coves where you can swim, snorkel, and relax in the sun. Enjoy a delicious onboard lunch, featuring fresh local ingredients, while taking in the breathtaking views of the coastline.

Throughout the day, you'll have plenty of free time to unwind, soak up the peaceful atmosphere, and maybe even spot some dolphins in the distance. As the afternoon draws to a close, we'll return to Kusadasi harbor, leaving you with unforgettable memories of a perfect day at sea.

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 11 - BACK TO ISTANBUL

After breakfast, we will transfer you to Izmir Airport for your flight to Istanbul. Upon arrival, you will be greeted by your guide and transferred to your hotel. The rest of the day is at leisure, perfect for shopping or exploring the vibrant sights of Istanbul at your own pace.

Included meals: Breakfast & Dinner

Accommodation: Istanbul

DAY 12 - FAREWELL TO TURKEY

After breakfast it is time to check out as we say farewell to Turkey. You will be transferred to the airport in time for your onward flight home.

Included meals: Breakfast

Accommodation: none

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Meet & Greet at Istanbul Airport [IST] on arrival
- One-way domestic economy flights: Istanbul [IST] - Izmir [ADB] - Istanbul [IST]
- Transport as detailed in the itinerary
- Accommodation as detailed in the itinerary
- Meals as detailed in the itinerary
- English speaking tour guide throughout
- All activities, visits and excursions as detailed in the itinerary
- Tour Director from The Big Journey Company (subject to minimum group size being reached.)

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Flights to/from Istanbul Airport [IST] - please contact us for a flight quotation
- ATOL Protection
- Drinks
- All entrance fees to non-stipulated attractions
- Visas, travel insurance
- Any personal items and anything not mentioned under included in price above
- Any meals not mentioned in itinerary
- Any optional activities offered
- Gratuities
- Any COVID tests or related entry & exit requirements

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- Please note, flights to/from Turkey are not included in this package. The Big Journey Company would be happy to provide a quotation for your flights - please contact us for further details
- Please let The Big Journey Company know prior to travelling if you have any medical needs or take any medication that we need to be made aware of to ensure that you have a safe and pleasant journey.
- Check in is after 2-3pm and check out is before 10am unless otherwise specified in the itinerary.
- Cancellation 90 - 0 days prior to departure cancellation fee is 100%. It is your responsibility to ensure the correct travel insurance in place to protect you against the need to cancel your holiday. Deposits are non-refundable.
- A non-refundable deposit is due at the time of booking. Full balance will be due 14 weeks prior to departure.
- Further terms and conditions apply and will be provided upon request or at the time of booking. The Big Journey Company reserves the right to withdraw any offer prior to accepting a reservation request. This does not affect your statutory rights. This offer is subject to availability and space is limited.
- Please consult your doctor letting them know your travel plans so that they can advise you about any vaccinations/medications you may need to take.

BOOK YOUR JOURNEY

Choose from the list of dates below

Call to Book

0844 3350 197

Monday to Friday 09:00 - 18:00 GMT