

EXPLORING TURKEY'S PAST AND PRESENT



ABOVE: HOT-AIR BALLOONING, CAPPADOCIA

Cappadocia – Mardin

Bounce from fresco-covered cave-churches and glaring mountain-top stone gods to the Neolithic temple where worship may have first begun on this Anatolian bus trip.

FACT BOX

Carbon: (kg per person): 87
 Distance (km): 1184
 Nights: 8-12
 Budget: €€
 When: May, Jun, Sep & Oct

1 Cappadocia

Regular flights from Istanbul land at Cappadocia's two airports, Kayseri and Nevşehir, from where shuttles provide transfers to the region's villages. Once here, a whole host of activities awaits. Hike between fairy-chimney rock pinnacles hidden within valleys of blush-tinged rock. View vibrant Byzantine frescoes in the cave-churches of Göreme Open-Air Museum and Ihlarra Valley. Delve through twisty, claustrophobic tunnels in Kaymaklı Underground City. And hover over



ABOVE: ZEUGMA MOSAIC MUSEUM'S GYPSY GIRL, GAZIANTEP

the lunar landscape in a hot-air balloon. All that and a great night's sleep in an atmospheric cave-hotel amid otherworldly scenery.

🚌 **Take the bus from Nevşehir Otogar (bus station) to Gaziantep (3 daily; 7hr 15min).**

2 Gaziantep

Gaze admiringly at world-renowned Roman art at Gaziantep's Zeugma Mosaic Museum, then indulge in the city's star culinary attraction, baklava. Get some of the sticky, syrup-drenched, pistachio goodness to go and enjoy it while strolling the Old Town's skinny bazaar alleys, chock-a-block with copper-workers and historic pastry shops.

🚌 **Take the bus to Şanlıurfa (hourly; 2hr 30min).**

3 Şanlıurfa

According to local lore, this ancient pilgrimage city was the birthplace of Abraham. Today, it's a place to feed fat sacred carp in Gölbaşı's ponds before losing your bearings in the maze-like bazaar. View a world-class collection in Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum then head out of town to Göbeklitepe for the T-shaped Neolithic temple pillars that turned modern archaeological theory on its head.

🚶 **Arrange a tour to Mt Nemrut in Şanlıurfa.**

4 Mt Nemrut

Glowering out across the barren hills below, Mt Nemrut's toppled stone-heads are the handiwork of an upstart Commagene king. After saying hello to King Antiochus and his godly consorts on the summit, wind down the mountain to visit the Commagene capital of Arsameia; stop off at the Karakuş Tümülüsü burial mound along the way.

🚌 **Back in Şanlıurfa, hop on a bus to Mardin (4 daily; 3hr).**

5 Mardin

This hillside cluster of honey-toned stone houses, home to a rich heritage that harks back to Anatolia's multicultural past, offers panoramas stretching out across the Mesopotamian Plains below. Wriggle your way through the bazaar, take in the vistas from the roof of Zinciriye Medresesi then tour the Syriac monastery of Deyrul Zafaran.

✈️ **Fly from Mardin Airport back to İstanbul for international connections (2 daily; 2hr).**

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ALTERNATIVES

📍 Extension: Antakya

Formerly biblical Antioch, where St Paul preached, Antakya is well worth a visit for its Archaeology Museum, which holds world-class Byzantine mosaics; and nearby St Peter's Church, one of the oldest on the planet. Make time, too, to explore the Old Town lanes and feast on Antakya's fusion of Turkish-Arab cuisine.

🚌 **There's a direct bus from Nevşehir Otogar in Cappadocia (daily; 7hr) or minibuses from Gaziantep (every 30min; 4hr).**

📍 Diversion: Van

Extend your trip northeast to Lake Van to see the reliefs in Akdamar Island's church, one of the masterworks of Armenian art. In Van town eat your way through a famed *Van kahvaltısı* (breakfast) before visiting the castle and the Urartian fortress of Çavuştepe.

🚌 **From Mardin, minibuses run to Diyarbakır (hourly; 1hr 15min) from where buses head to Van (several daily; 6hr 30min). Van Airport has daily flights to İstanbul (2hr 15min).**

