

Seven Churches, Istanbul & Cappadocia

Day 1 - Welcome to **Istanbul**, a city with a mysterious past that has borrowed from a myriad of cultures and blended all into an unmatched splendor. Look for your Rainbow representative as you exit the airport and begin the adventure of a lifetime. Overnight in Istanbul.

Day 2 - Today we begin our tour at the **Hippodrome**. Listen to the roar of 100,000 voices as they cheer their favorites to victory in the athletic competitions of antiquity. We follow the street around to the **Blue Mosque**, mingle with the Islamic worshippers and stare with wonder at the marvelous blue-tiled dome and walls from which the mosque gains its name. Across the way we visit **St. Sophia** with its unparalleled majesty—stories told of the history of Christianity, Islam and rulers through the ages in the mosaics and frescoes that line the walls. From here we make our way to the **Yerebatan Sarayi (Underground Cisterns)** built during the time of the Byzantine Empire to provide the most often besieged city in the world with water. Constructed with columns and capitals from ancient temples, it is most decorative, thus referred to as a saray (Turkish for palace).

We crown the morning sightseeing with the **Topkapi Palace**, poised on the hillside of the Golden Horn. The most eastern and Turkish of the palaces, it is a show place of Ottoman grandeur.

After lunch, eaten in one of the numerous restaurants along the way, we enter another world, the **Grand Covered Bazaar** with its 4,000+ stalls—a shopper's perfect delight. Smell the scents and listen to the sounds of the traditional life of Turkey; bargain with the merchants and move on if the two of you cannot agree—there is another offer just down the aisle.

Overnight in Istanbul.

Day 3 - For the sailor in you there is the **Bosphorus Cruise** this morning. The two shores abound in modern villas, centuries-old palaces, ancient walls and the fantastic skyline of the city rising on each side of the straits. Feel the warm breezes and transport yourself to a time when you may have come to the shores as a conquering hero or returned with bounty from victory over a neighboring empire.

After a “fast food” lunch of delicious Turkish cuisine, we visit the 11th century **Chora Church**, home of some of the finest mosaics and frescoes to be found in the country. We transfer to the airport for an early evening flight to Kayseri. Overnight in Cappadocia.

Day 4 - **Cappadocia** transports you into a geological wonderland. Step back in time and discover the strange, but beautiful, formations of the region, which give it an otherworldly



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appearance. Historically it dates to the 19th century BC when Assyrian traders developed native city-states later followed by the Hittite, Persian, Roman, Byzantine, Seljuk, Ottoman and Turkish periods.

Christianity came early to the area as Apostle Paul passed through on his way to Ankara (Ankara). The region became home to many monasteries as those of the early church sought refuge from the distractions of the world. Estimates place as many as 600 rock-cut churches in the hillsides. In the days of Arab raids, homes were dug to form underground shelters, which ultimately became underground cities. The largest, **Derinkuyu**, houses an entire community of homes, storehouses, wine cellars, stables, tunnels, water wells, church, graves and school.

The **Uchisar Fortress**, carved out of a natural hill dominating the area, stands on the top with breathtaking views of the surrounding formations. The **Goreme Valley**, site of many churches with vibrant colored frescos, is also on our itinerary. Overnight in Cappadocia.



Day 5 - We continue our tour of Cappadocia through the picturesque **Ihlara Valley**. In **Avanos (Venessa)** we shop for pottery and carpets in this small town built along the banks of Halys (Salt) River—its water colored by Cappadocia’s rich deposits of clay as it flows to the Black Sea. From here we travel to **Zelve**, an inhabited town until the 1950s when it was relocated. Now the original site is an open-air museum. Among the Christian sites and symbols we also find a mosque. Overnight in Cappadocia.

Day 6 - In the morning we fly from Kayseri airport to **Izmir** via Istanbul. A short distance, but the route finds most of our day exploring airports. Upon arriving in Izmir, we take a short tour of **Smyrna (Izmir)**, which is located just across the bay from present day Izmir. The ancient city of Smyrna has Hittite remains still visible today. Despite natural disasters and marauding armies amid shifting ruling powers, Izmir (ancient Smyrna) is one of the oldest continuously inhabited communities of the world. Its early Christian influence rest primarily on the work of Polycarp, a bishop here from 115-156 AD and ultimately a martyr for his faith. John told the Christians in Smyrna not to be afraid to suffer but “...be faithful till death” (*Revelation 2:10-11*). Overnight in Izmir.

Day 7 - Our sites today are **Pergamum** and the small ruins at **Thyatira**. Pergamum, perched on the hilltop above the modern city of Bergama, is one of the most dramatic sites in Turkey. Strolling through the significant unearthed remnants of marble temples, one wonders at the “technology” which made the construction possible. From the

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mountainside we descend to the valley and tour the ancient medical center, the **Asclepion**, established by the great physician, Galen. The ancient city of Thyatira is now occupied by the modern town of Akhisar. Here the few ancient ruins are merged into the town around it so close your eyes and imagine the once thriving commercial city. Overnight in Izmir.

Day 8 - The ruins of **Sardis** are one of the most picturesque areas of any of the Seven Churches. John admonished that the outward appearance of prosperity and activity did not tally with the finished work—"though you have the name of being alive, you are dead..." (*Revelation 3:1-2*). **Philadelphia** was one of the two churches about which John said nothing negative. The most interesting remains of Christian Philadelphia are part of a Byzantine basilica and some 11th century frescoes. **Hierapolis (Pamukkale)**, a spectacular sight offering hot springs and calcified, cascading white terraces resembling snow, is the result of the calcium deposits developed over time as water flowed over the area. Here we associate Philip the Evangelist with the early church. Paul mentions Hierapolis along with **Laodicea** as the center of Epaphras's ministry. Another less known resident of the city was Papias, a disciple of the Apostle John. Overnight in Pamukkale.



Day 9 - Our drive to Selcuk to visit **Ephesus** brings us to the most impressive archeological site in Turkey. As we stroll the streets of the ancient city, it is easy to imagine it as it appeared to Paul. Undoubtedly one of the most beautiful cities of the ancient world, Ephesus has special significance for Christians. From here Paul preached, Timothy taught, while later, John warned the church at Ephesus "...you have abandoned the love (you had) at first." (*Revelation 2:4*). We will also visit **St. John's Basilica** built by Emperor Justinian in the 6th century and believed to contain the remains of the Apostle John. The **Ephesus Museum** is one of Turkey's best. Marble and bronze statues are displayed along with jewelry, coins and other artifacts of the Ancient World. Overnight in Izmir. (Option to fly back to Istanbul and overnight there or catch an onward flight in the evening.)

Day 10 - In the morning transfer to the airport for your return home filled with the thrill of having walked with Paul and John through their words and the places of which they told; having felt what it must have been like hiding in caves for protection and, gaining a new appreciation of the early Christians and their commitment.