Fairy-Chimney Balloons at Dawn, a Cotton-White Cliff at Dusk — A 9-Day Turkey Itinerary

Istanbul · Cappadocia · Pamukkale · Ephesus

DURATION
9 Days

BEST TIME TO GO
April–May & Sept–Oct
mild 65–80°F days and clear skies for Cappadocia balloon flights; avoid Jul–Aug heat and Dec–Feb balloon cancellations

FROM
$1,850 USD / person
for 2 people sharing mid-range hotels, a domestic flight, tours, transfers & meals; excludes international flights to Istanbul

Day 1 Istanbul — Two Continents, One Old Town

Land in Istanbul and settle into Sultanahmet, the old city's peninsula between the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara, with just enough daylight left for a first look at the Hippodrome and the Blue Mosque's six minarets.

Transfer: Istanbul Airport to SultanahmetET* fTt3t 5TL (FRO3 963 .960784(~ 0 eftut Tj 0 4 fra, $40 0 1 36 vehig

Day 2 Istanbul — Hagia Sophia to the Grand Bazaar

A full day through the old city's three headline sights — Hagia Sophia's cavernous dome, Topkapi Palace's treasury, and the vaulted alleys of the Grand Bazaar — with a historic lunch stop between them.

Guided Tour: Hagia Sophia, Topkapi Palace & Grand Bazaar

~7 hours · from $85 USD/person

A licensed-guide day covering the 6th-century Hagia Sophia, the Ottoman sultans' Topkapi Palace and treasury, and the 4,000-shop covered maze of the Grand Bazaar, timed to avoid the worst of the midday queues.

GetYourGuide · www.getyourguide.com/istanbul-l56

Lunch: Pandeli

~1 hour · lunch from $28 USD/person

A tiled, turquoise-domed dining room above the Spice Bazaar's entrance, serving Ottoman-Turkish classics since 1901 — a convenient, historic stop between the palace and the bazaar.

Pandeli Restaurant · www.pandeli.com.tr

Free Time: Spice Bazaar

~1 hour · free (browsing)

Cones of saffron, sumac and Turkish delight stacked under a 17th-century vaulted ceiling next door to the Grand Bazaar — a smaller, easier souvenir stop before heading back to the hotel.

Day 3 Bosphorus Cruise to Cappadocia

A relaxed morning cruise up the Bosphorus strait — Europe on one side, Asia on the other — before an evening flight trades Istanbul's skyline for Cappadocia's moonscape of valleys.

Bosphorus Sunset Cruise

~2.5 hours · from $65 USD/person

A boat trip past the Ottoman waterfront palaces, the Rumeli fortress and the bridges linking Europe to Asia, ending as the sky over the strait turns pink behind the Bosphorus Bridge.

Bosphorus Cruise · www.bosphoruscruise.com.tr

Galata Tower & Karakoy

~2 hours · tower entry from $30 USD/person

A 14th-century Genoese watchtower with a 360-degree deck over the Golden Horn, followed by a wander through

Red Tour: Derinkuyu Underground City, Uchisar Castle & Pigeon Valley

~7 hours · from $70 USD/person

A guided loop to Derinkuyu, an 18-level underground city that once sheltered thousands, the volcanic-rock outcrop of Uchisar Castle for panoramic valley views, and a walk through Pigeon Valley's dovecote-riddled cliffs.

TurcoTravel · turcotravel.com

Hike: Red & Rose Valley

~2 hours · free (self-guided)

An easy afternoon walk through Cappadocia's most photogenic valley, its rock walls turning shades of red and rose as the sun drops — a quieter way to see the fairy chimneys from the ground.

Dinner: Seten Restaurant

~1.5 hours · dinner from $30 USD/person

A terrace restaurant on Goreme's edge serving Anatolian clay-pot testi kebab, cracked open tableside, with valley views for a last cave-country sunset.

Day 6 Cappadocia to Pamukkale — The Cotton Castle

A domestic flight and an overland transfer trade Cappadocia's cave country for Pamukkale's travertine terraces — mineral-white pools cascading down a hillside, glowing orange at sunset.

Flight: Cappadocia (Kayseri) to Izmir

~1 hour 20 minutes · from $75 USD/person

A domestic connection from Kayseri Erkilet Airport (ASR) to Izmir Adnan Menderes Airport (ADB) on AnadoluJet, the standard routing between central Anatolia and the Aegean coast.

AnadoluJet · www.anadolujet.com

Transfer: Izmir Airport to Pamukkale

~3 hours · from $120 USD per vehicle

A private car or shared shuttle east across the Aegean interior to Pamukkale, arranged with pickup timed to reach the travertines while there's still light for photos.

Pamukkale Turizm · www.pamukkaleturizm.com.tr

Hierapolis Ruins & Travertine Terraces at Sunset

~2.5 hours · entry from $17 USD/person

Bone-white calcium terraces stepping down the hillside, walkable barefoot, above the Roman ruins of Hierapolis — a theater, necropolis and the ancient thermal pool where Cleopatra is said to have bathed.

Check-In: Hierapark Thermal & Spa Hotel

From $130 USD/night, for 2 people

A spa hotel in neighboring Karahayit with its own thermal mineral pools fed by the same springs that formed the travertines — a soak after a day of travel.

Hierapark Thermal & Spa Hotel · www.hieraparkhotel.com

Day 7 Pamukkale to Ephesus — Onward to the Aegean

A free morning to soak in the thermal pools before the drive south to Selcuk, the small town beside the ruins of Ephesus, with time for an easy first look around before tomorrow's full day among the ruins.

Free Morning: Thermal Mineral Pools

flexible · included with hotel stay

A last soak in the warm, mineral-rich spring water before checkout — the same source that has drawn bathers to Pamukkale since Roman times.

Transfer: Pamukkale to Selcuk

~3 hours · from $110 USD per vehicle

A private transfer southwest through the Meander river valley to Selcuk, the small town that sits beside the Ephesus ruins and serves as the base for visiting them.

Pamukkale Turizm · www.pamukkaleturizm.com.tr

Check-In: Ephesus Boutique Hotel

From $95 USD/night, for 2 people

A small hotel in central Selcuk with a garden courtyard, an easy walk from both the town's Byzantine aqueduct and the minibuses to Ephesus.

Ephesus Boutique Hotel · www.ephesusboutiquehotel.com

Dinner: Okkes Restaurant

~1.5 hours · dinner from $22 USD/person

A family-run Selcuk spot known for testi kebab and fresh Aegean meze, popular with travelers based in town for Ephesus.

Day 8 Ephesus — Marble Streets & the Library of Celsus

A full day at Ephesus, one of the best-preserved ancient cities in the Mediterranean, followed by an afternoon to unwind on the Aegean coast before the trip's last dinner.

Full-Day Tour: Ephesus & the House of the Virgin Mary

~6 hours · from $95 USD/person

A guided walk down Ephesus's marble Curetes Street past the Library of Celsus's two-story facade and the 25,000-seat Great Theatre, plus a stop at the hilltop House of the Virgin Mary.

Ephesus Tours By Locals · www.ephesustoursbylocals.com

Free Time: Kusadasi Ladies Beach

flexible · free

A calm, sandy stretch of the Aegean a short drive from Selcuk — an easy way to unwind after two straight days of ruins and travertines.

Farewell Dinner: Kazim Usta

~2 hours · dinner from $35 USD/person

A long-running Kusadasi seafood restaurant on the water, grilled catch of the day and mezze for a last Aegean sunset before heading home.

Day 9 Departure

A short transfer to Izmir's airport closes out the trip — or, with more time, an easy add-on flight back through Istanbul for one more night in the old city.

Transfer: Selcuk to Izmir Adnan Menderes Airport

~45 minutes · from $50 USD per vehicle

A straightforward drive north to Izmir Adnan Menderes Airport (ADB) for onward or international flights home.

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