

EASTERN TURKEY

Character: Cultural touring

Start: Kars

Finish: Ankara

Duration: 4 days / 4 nights

Accommodation: Superior local hotels

Meals: 4 breakfasts

Mode of travel: Comfortable, air-conditioned vehicles/on foot

Tour support: Local guide fluent in English, driver

Included:

Accommodation for 4 nights

Meals as per itinerary

Services of local guide fluent in English

All activities & sightseeing with entrance fees

All transfers in comfortable, air-conditioned vehicles

Excluded:

Optional activities

Day 1**Kars**

Departure for Turkey from Georgia, meeting with your local guide at the border. Drive across a landscape dominated by the towering presence of Mount Ararat and reach Kars. Founded originally by Armenians, the city became the capital of Armenian Kingdom before it was transferred to nearby Ani. Short city tour of Kars visiting some of its major historical sites, including the citadel that dominates the town, Church of St. Gregory the Illuminator and the remarkable Ethnographic Museum containing samples of jewellery, kilims as well as ancient pottery, religious accessories and some fascinating reminders of the Russian and Armenian influences on the town. Proceed to ruins of Ani, the capital of Armenian kingdom for centuries and an important trading point at the great Silk Road. Parts of the citadel and the Cathedral still remain and its many ruined churches still retain some of their remarkable decorations and wall paintings. The city remains a major pilgrimage site for Armenians from around the world even today. Back to Kars, rest and overnight.

Overnight: Hotel in Kars

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 2**Van via Dogubeyazet**

After breakfast drive to Dogu Beyazet, the site of spectacular Ishak Pasha Palace. It has an eclectic mix of Armenian, Georgian, Ottoman, Persian and Selçuk architectural styles and was said to contain 366 rooms, one for each day of the year. It is said that Pasha, on completion of the project, chopped off the hands of the Armenian architect who designed it, to prevent him from building anything similar in the future. Proceed to explore the nearby bas-reliefs of what is believed to have been an Urartian Citadel, dating from the 9th century BC. After lunch we continue via the cascading falls around Muradiye and arrive at the town of Van, lying on the eastern shores of Lake Van. Overnight at hotel in Van.

Overnight: Hotel in Van

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 3**Van**

After breakfast drive to the village of Cavustepe, where we will find the site of the Urartian palace of King Sardur II (8th century BC). This, along with the dramatic Kurdish fortress at Hosap will constitute our sightseeing of this morning. The fortress of Hosap Kalesi is an impressive site - a medieval stronghold that dominates the village and was built in the 17th century by the order of Suleyman Bey. The castle's walls were once protected by 40 towers, it was abandoned following a siege by the Ottoman Turks in the 19th century. Returning to Van we visit the Rock of Van, a rocky plug rising up from the lakeshore, towering above the old city of Van and supporting the imposing mass of the castle built by Sardur I and the tomb of King Argishti.

Overnight: Hotel in Van

Meal plan: Breakfast

Day 4**Akhtamar Island**

Boat trip on Lake Van to Aktamar Island. Seven times the size of Lake Geneva, Lake Van is the largest lake in Turkey and the largest saline lake in the world. We will visit Akdamar Island and its Armenian Church of the Holy Cross, a superb example of Armenian architecture that dates from the 10th century. Set against the spectacular backdrop of the lake it still retains its majesty, enhanced by the startling diversity of its

exterior reliefs and *kachkars*, traditional Armenian cross-stones. After lunch we will return to Van, where the rest of the afternoon is free for your own exploration.

Overnight: Hotel in Van

Meal plan: Breakfast

Morning transfer to airport for departure flight to Ankara.

Please note: this tour is offered as a post-tour extension to your Caucasus trip. It can also be operated in the opposite direction – as a pre-tour extension.