

Title:

A complete Guide to visiting Turkey

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Summary:

A detailed guide to Turkey, its history and its culture with essential information for those visiting on Holiday or considering to buy property in Turkey.

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Article Body:

Turkey is a country of diversity, stunning scenery, warm hospitality, and a whole range of resorts and activities to suit all tastes. A country spanning two continents where east meets west and 10,000 years of civilisation, Turkey is a treasure trove of history and culture.

Weather in Turkey - Southern Mediterranean and Aegean Coasts

Turkey's Mediterranean and Aegean coasts boast a perfect Mediterranean climate with low humidity. The long, extended summer runs between May and October with temperatures ranging from the low 20°Cs at the beginning and end of the season, up to the mid 30°Cs in the hottest months of July and August.

During spring, the scent of citrus blossoms fills the air, the hills and valleys are green with vegetation and the cool, sunny days are ideal for hiking and sightseeing. During the autumn months it is a pleasure to visit historical and natural sites in the cool weather or to buy up bargains at end-of-season sales! Winters tend to be mild with some sun, and occasional showers, and it is not unusual to be able to swim in the sea even in November.

Turkish Culture

The mix of cultural influences and traditions in Turkey is one of the things that draw tourists to the country. Turkey has a rich cultural heritage with a long history of influences from both Europe and Asia, which is reflected in the complexity and diversity of certain Turkish arts, language and handicrafts. Turks are proud of their centuries-old musical tradition, which is similar to

the music of nearby Islamic regions such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and northern India. A cosmopolitan nation, Turkey has also adopted and developed ideas and traditions that combine Western, Asian, and Arabic elements.

The Family

Turkish family units are extremely important. Children often stay with their families until they get married and then continue to be the main focus of their families' lives. Grandparents are often available to look after the children allowing the parents to go out to work. There is a great respect for elders in Turkish Culture and you can often see the younger generation kissing an elder's hand and then touching the forehead as a sign of respect.

Turkish Women

Equal rights for women were officially added to the civil code in 2002, so women now have equal say in relation to family matters and property and assets are divided equally in the event of a divorce. Women no longer need their husbands consent to obtain jobs and they are also entitled to continue using their maiden name if they wish once they are married.

The Evil Eye

The 'evil eye' is an ancient belief and is one of the most widespread superstitions in Turkey. It is believed that the 'evil eye' is created by feelings of extreme envy towards a person or object and that it can cast a spell on the object of it's gaze bringing bad fortune. The 'nazar boncuk' or 'evil eye bead' is actually a benevolent eye used to ward off harm and evil. It can be seen providing protection everywhere - in homes and buildings, in the car, and they are even worn by babies and young children.

Hamam

The Hamam, or Turkish Bath, was a Roman and Byzantine tradition which was adopted by the Selcuk Turks in the 11th century and has been part of the Turkish Culture and a way of life ever since. It claimed an important role in society as not only was it a place where the faithful could follow the Muslim precept of cleanliness, it was also a place in which to socialize, gossip and even talk business or politics. The exfoliation, bathing and massage routine provide both a relaxing and exhilarating experience. Today Hamams can be found in most Turkish towns and cities and are they are popular with both locals and tourists alike.

Family Holidays in Turkey

Turks love children and always extend a warm welcome to our young holidaymakers. There are many activities in Turkey which will keep children happy, the most popular being spending time on the gently shelving beaches which are ideal for families. For the more active, walking, horse riding, cycling and watersports are available.

Did you know?

Turkey is home to two of the Seven Wonders of the World, the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, and the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (present day Bodrum)

St Nicholas, popularly known as Santa Claus, was born and lived in Turkey

Noah's Ark is said to have landed at Mount Ararat in Eastern Turkey

Turkey provides 70% of the world's hazelnuts

Gave the English language many words including chock-a block, turquoise, yoghurt, kismet, kilim and parchment

Turkey first introduced tulips to Holland and today still supplies tulips worldwide. The tulip is also Turkey's national flower

Turkey was the first ever land to mind and use coins 2700 years ago by the Lydians

Turkey has the world's first female Supreme Court Judge, and gave the women the right to vote in 1934

Religion

Whilst the population of Turkey is about 99% Muslim, the country is a secular state which allows complete freedom of worship to non-muslims. Tourists visiting coastal resorts are unlikely to see much evidence that they are in a Muslim country, except for the call to prayer which can be heard 5 times per day. If visiting a mosque, dress conservatively and avoid visiting during prayer times or on Fridays, the holy day. On the coast, dress is generally relaxed beachwear for locals and tourists alike. It is only in smaller villages, more remote areas and the east of the country that the dress codes are more formal and more traditional.

During Ramadan, or Ramazan, as it is known in Turkey, some locals may fast from sunrise to sunset. This is quite relaxed in the resort areas and should not have any affect at all to visitors.

Public Holidays in Turkey

Government offices and banks will be closed on public holidays, but life in the resort areas continues much as usual. Money exchange bureaux and most shops and restaurants open as normal.

History of Turkey

Historically known as Asia Minor or Anatolia, this vast region reflects a remarkable and fascinating history with settled habitation dating back to the eighth millennium BC. Anatolia has seen virtually every major western civilisation come and go including the Assyrians, Hittities, Phrygians, Urartian, Greeks and Romans. Treasured artefacts, including what is believed to be the first landscape picture ever painted were left behind and are displayed at Ankara's Museum of Anatolian Civilisations. Many of the museums' artefacts are the only clues we have to the earliest civilisations.

Some of the finest sites emerged from the Hellenistic period such as the remains of ancient Troy and the ruined settlements of Lycia. The most impressive of them all is ancient Ephesus. It is believed that the Virgin Mary spent her last days in a small house on the edge of Ephesus whilst St John the Evangelist came to look after her. Now a place of Pilgrimage for Roman Catholics, the house has received the official sanction of the Vatican.

In 560 BC the King of Persia, Cyrus, conquered everybody and everything and soon subjected the Aegean cities to his rule. However, 200 years later they were defeated by Alexander the Great. He led the Macedonians eastward across Anatolia as far as India in pursuit of gaining the domination of Asia. Sure enough, he rapidly conquered the entire Middle East, from Greece to India.

Following its conquest by Rome in the 2nd century BC, Asia Minor enjoyed centuries of peace. During the Middle Ages as part of the Byzantine Empire it became a centre of Christianity.

The Great Seljuk Empire, based in Persia, was the first real Turkish state in Anatolia. This empire had a distinctive culture with beautiful architecture and design. The Seljuks Empire quickly declined with Anatolia fragmented into a number of small emirates. The Turks gradually moved in on these states one by

one which eventually grew to be the largest empire in recent history, the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans ruled for more than six centuries until 1922. The following year, Asia Minor became the larger part of the Turkish Republic led by Ataturk.

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was the main drive behind the development of modern Turkey. The former army officer became Turkey's first President and steered the country from the wreckage of the Ottoman Empire. Ataturk introduced dramatic reforms that touched upon every aspect of Turkish life. There were many significant changes including replacing the Arabic script with Latin characters. Primary education was made compulsory and religious law was abolished. Women were granted equal rights in matters of custody and inheritance and by 1934 women's rights had extended to Universal Suffrage.

Ataturk was and still is a national hero- a massive presence in the long history of Turkey. In every town and village you will find reminders of the leader everywhere you turn. As time goes by Ataturk becomes even more of a hero as the country's people recognize his extraordinary influence in making Turkey what it is today.

Turkish Food & Drink

Turkish food is amongst the best in the world. With enough climatic zones to grow most ingredients locally, there is a vast array of produce to excite and entice the palate.

Besides its famous kebab dishes, there are many other traditional Turkish foods to choose from. Meze (appetisers) for which Turkey is justly famous, are a range of hundreds of small dishes from simple combinations such as cheese with melon to elaborately stuffed vegetables. These are served in all Turkish restaurants and are traditionally accompanied with Raki, a clear anise- flavoured spirit claimed to be Turkey's national alcoholic drink.

Turkey's most popular beers are the home produced Efes Pilsen and Tuborg, and whilst the wine industry has yet to realise it's full potential, Kavaklidere and Doluca, the best known brands, produce a selection of both red and white wines.

Shopping in Turkey offers the most unusual and diverse range of gifts tempting even the non-shoppers amongst us.

Traditional handicrafts such as carpets, kilims, copper goods, painted ceramics and jewellery are popular buys, along with a good selection of leather goods, sandals and beachwear which can be found in most of the larger resorts.

In tourist and coastal areas, opening hours are quite flexible and during the

summer many shops stay open until late in the evening, seven days a week, leaving tourists to browse at their leisure and escape the heat of the day.

In souvenir shops and stalls, it's always worth trying a spot of haggling. For food shopping, local minimarkets provide basic essentials, whilst the supermarkets found near the larger resorts are similar to those we are used to at home. Most resorts have a weekly market selling local produce, crafts and textiles and are well worth a visit.

Transport

Hiring a car is one of the best ways to get out and about, giving you the freedom to explore at your leisure.

Local transport within the towns and resorts consists of dolmus or minibuses (taxis) that run from one point to another and you can hop on and off anywhere along the route and pay according to the distance travelled.

Things to do in Turkey

Turkey offers a wide variety of activities for couples and families alike.

Watersports including windsurfing, parasailing, jet skiing and canoeing are popular on designated beaches in or near many of the larger resorts. Scuba diving is also widely available, and the calm, clear waters are ideal for beginners and novice divers. Walking and trekking are becoming increasingly popular and they offer one of the best ways to explore the countryside.

Currency in Turkey

New Turkish Lira (YTL) is the official currency in Turkey. "Y" stands for "Yeni" ("New") in Turkish as the new notes and coins replaced the old currency which was withdrawn from circulation in January 2006. It can be purchased from your bank in advance, in which case we would advise you to order at least two weeks before your departure date. Alternatively you can change money, or travellers cheques once you have arrived in Turkey. It's easy to change up all major currencies in exchange offices, post offices and hotels. Exchange offices are also located in the arrivals halls at most Turkish airports.

Currency can be also obtained from ATM/cash machines throughout Turkey, providing the symbols on the machine match those on your debit/cash card. Your bank should be able to give you further information on using your card abroad. If you do find yourself short of Turkish Lira at any point, many shops and

restaurants in the coastal resorts and larger cities will accept payment in foreign currency. But if you are planning to travel to other parts of the country, it is advisable to carry some Turkish Lira.

The New Turkish Lira comes in notes of 5,10, 20, 50 and 100. The coins, called New Kurus (Ykr), come in 1, 5, 10, 25, 50 and one New Turkish Lira. One hundred New Kurus equals one New Turkish Lira.

Please note that Scottish currency is not accepted in Turkey. It is also worth noting that they may not accept any foreign bank notes for exchange which are ripped or have been scribbled on.

Passports & Visas

British citizens require a standard ten year passport which must be valid for at least six months after the date of arrival back in the UK. Children under 16 years require their own passport if not already on a parents passport before October 1998.

British citizens (including infants) have to pay a tourist visa of £10 upon arrival. This must be paid in note form in cash. Scottish currency is not accepted in Turkey.

Full details and application forms for a full British passport can be obtained from main post offices or direct from the Passport Office.

Non UK passport holders are recommended to contact the appropriate Embassy in London as to their visa fee.

Turkey Time Difference

Turkey is two hours ahead of the UK. It is a good idea to adjust your watch as soon as you arrive, as any airline timetables are expressed in local time.

Vaccinations for Turkey

No vaccination certificates are compulsory for entry to Turkey. You should always check with your doctor, in good time prior to departure, if there are any inoculations the Department of Health consider necessary or advisable for any specific areas.

When To Go

The main season for visitors to Turkey's western Aegean and Mediterranean coastal resorts is between May to October, when the weather is settled and the days are long and sunny.

Temperatures range from the mid 20°Cs early and late season, to the mid 30°Cs during the peak season of July and August which is also the most popular time to visit when all the activities are in full swing. The sea temperatures are warm and ideal for swimming throughout the summer, and it is not unusual to be able to swim in the sea even in November.

In the coastal resorts we have a selection of properties suitable for occupation in late autumn, winter and early spring where you can discover the changing seasons. Please contact us for further information. There may be an additional charge for heating. The Turkish resorts do quieten down in winter and many facilities available during the summer months may not be available during winter.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will I be able to use my mobile phone?

Generally speaking, mobile phone coverage in Turkey is very good - the exception being some of the more remote and/or mountainous areas. It is important to remember that when using a British mobile phone, in Turkey, to contact our overseas offices and staff, even though you are linking up to the local network your call must be prefixed by 00 90 and you should then drop the first 0 of the Turkish phone number.

What currency will I require?

New Turkish Lira (YTL) is the official currency in Turkey. Currency can be purchased in the UK but we advise you to order at least two weeks before your departure date to avoid any last minute rush. Once in Turkey, it's easy to change up all major currencies in exchange offices, post offices (PTTs) and hotels. Currency can be also obtained from ATM/cash machines throughout Turkey, providing the symbols on the machine match those on your debit/cash card. Your bank should be able to give you further information on using your card abroad. If you do find yourself short of Turkish Lira at any point, foreign currency, including pounds sterling, is readily accepted in many shops, hotels and restaurants in the tourist areas.

Travellers Cheques or Credit Cards?

Credit cards are now very widely accepted in shops and some restaurants in the main towns and resorts. Though you should always check beforehand if you intend to have a meal and pay afterwards using the card. Many small, family run

restaurants or establishments may not accept cards. The smaller villages and places 'off the beaten track' may also not accept credit cards so have some cash handy.

Currency can be obtained from ATM/cash machines throughout Turkey, providing the symbols on the machine match those on your debit/cash card. Your bank should be able to give you further information on using your card abroad. Travellers
Cheques can be cashed at banks, exchange bureaux and most of the larger hotels.

What is the voltage and do we need to use adaptors?

The current is 220 V. Wall sockets take two rounded pin plugs, like many European countries. You will need an adapter plug to use UK appliances.

Is there a time difference?

Yes, Turkey is on GMT + 2 (daylight saving GMT +3 operates between late March to late September). This means that for most of the year, Turkey is two hours ahead of the UK. It is a good idea to adjust your watch as soon as you arrive in Turkey.

What should I take?

You can now find most western goods, including holiday essentials such as suntan and aftersun lotions, insect and mosquito repellents, and such like in most of the larger resorts and supermarkets. Taking these items with you saves time and also ensures that you can find your preferred brands. It's worth taking a high protection sunscreen, especially during high season when temperatures can soar, a wide-brimmed sun hat, and a mosquito repellent both for your room and a spray for yourself when you are outside in the evenings. Also do take a European-type 2 pin adaptor for your electrical equipment - these can be difficult to find in Turkey. A photocopy of your passport is useful to keep on you as a means of ID, and if you are driving, a copy of your license as well to keep in the car.

Are shops open on the day of our arrival?

During the summer season, and especially in the resort areas, supermarkets, minimarkets and many shops are open daily, often till early evening.
As a general guideline opening days and times are as follows:

Banks: 09.00 - 12.00 and 13.30 - 17.00 Monday to Friday.

Post Offices: (identified by yellow PTT signs) 08.00 - 20.00 Monday to Saturday, and 09.00 - 19.00 on Sundays.

Museums - 09.00 - 17.00 Tuesday to Sunday.

Chemists (eczane) - 09.00-19.00 Monday to Saturday. A duty chemist is appointed

on a rota basis to remain open for 24 hours, details of which are posted in any chemist's front window.

Shops: in the resorts, and particularly during the summer months, bazaars and many tourist shops open daily from around 09.00 till late in the evening, often till 22.00. More regular type shops may close earlier in the evening, and on Sundays.

Supermarkets: Most supermarkets are open daily, and the larger ones are often open till 22.00 during the summer, a few open 24 hours.

Cafés and restaurants tend to operate open-ended hours and may not close till early in the morning.

Are there insects?

There can be mosquito's in certain areas so a plug in deterrent is an idea. Ants are frequent in some rural areas.

What is driving like in Turkey?

As in the rest of the Mediterranean, other road users may seem to the UK driver to drive unpredictably. The roads are generally well kept though some coastal or mountain roads can be narrow and winding. You should be aware of the following points:

Traffic drives on the right in Turkey, which means you must give way to the right at junctions and roundabouts (vehicles joining the roundabout have right of way).

The wearing of seat belts is compulsory.

There are strict drink driving laws - the rule is absolutely no alcohol if you intend to drive. Random tests are quite common and police will issue on the spot fines.

If another vehicle flashes it's lights, this means that it is coming through, not that they are giving way to you.

You should drive defensively at all times, and great care should be taken when driving after dark as you may come across inadequately lit vehicles, slow moving

lorries or animals wandering across the road.