



**TURKEY: BIRDING AND CULTURE
EXTRAVAGANZA**

23 MAY – 11 JUNE 2019



Brown Fish Owl is one of our targets on this trip.

This expansive tour will cover the following fascinating areas of Turkey: Istanbul, Belgrade Forest, Oymapinar Dam, Göksu Delta, Aladaglar National Park, Sultan Marsh, Cappadocia, Tuzla, Yumurtalik Lagoon, Işikli and Durnalik, Birecik and Halfeti, Kizilkuyu, Mount Nemrut, Lake Sodali Gol, northwest coast of Lake Van, Çaldıran Plain, foothills of Mount Tendürek, Lake Erçek, and Bendimahi Marshes.

Included Highlights and Sightseeing:

Istanbul, Throne of two Continents:

Hagia Sophia and Blue Mosques; Hippodrome Square, Grand Bazaar

Bosporus tour by boat (public boat, approximately 2 - 3 hours)

Antalya: City with Lycian, Pamphylian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Seljuk, and Ottoman architecture and cultures

World Heritage Cappadocia: Göreme Open Air Museum; Red Valley, Avanos. Visiting a pottery studio and carpet weavers (traditional and cultural heritage of Cappadocia)

Gaziantep: One of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world

Şanlıurfa (Urfa): Old city center, with its mixed Arab, Kurdish, and Turkish population

Kâhta/Karadut: Mount Nemrut and statues (sculptures) of Mount Nemrut

Diyarbakir: A city of 26 civilizations during its 5000 year history, with its old city center surrounded by historic city walls

Hasankeyf: The ancient town

Doğubeyazit: Ishak Pasha Palace, masterpiece of Ottoman architecture

Van Fortress: A citadel constructed by the Urartian king Sardur, Akdamar Island, Church of the Holy Cross

Please note that the detailed itinerary below cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Itinerary (20 days/19 nights)

Day 1. Istanbul

You will be met at the international Istanbul Atatürk Airport and transferred to your hotel. A meeting will be held this evening with your guide to introduce the trip and for you to meet your fellow travelers. Later we will have dinner.

Transfer time: 30 minutes. Transfer distance: 18 km (Istanbul Atatürk Airport – Hotel in Sultanahmet [Old Istanbul])

Overnight: Centrum Hotel – <http://hotelcentrumistanbul.com> – or similar, Istanbul

Day 2. Istanbul – Belgrade Forest – Bosporus tour by boat

Istanbul is one of the crossroads of avian migratory routes, squeezed not only between two continents, but also two climate systems, the European and the Mediterranean. The northern shores are fringed with humid forests, whereas the southern shores are drier. With its lagoons, seashores, and forests, Istanbul provides excellent birding opportunities.

Early in the morning we drive to the districts of Eyüp and Sariyer to visit the Belgrade Forest. With an area of around 5,500 hectares of forest, it houses a multitude of plant, bird, and animal species. The Belgrade Forest is under protection and one of the most-visited recreational areas of Istanbul. The most common tree in the forest is Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*). A visit to the Belgrade Forest enables us to see such forest birds as **Semicollared Flycatcher, Short-toed Treecreeper, Marsh Tit, Hawfinch, and Grey-headed, Great, Middle, and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers.**

In the afternoon we take time to explore Istanbul by boat on a public boat tour, known as the Bosphorus tour and leading right through the heart of Istanbul, which will take between two and three hours. The Bosphorus is a 32-km (20-mile)-long strait, which joins the Sea of Marmara with the Black Sea and separates the continents of Europe and Asia. The Bosphorus, also known as the Istanbul Strait, as part of the only passage between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, has always been of great commercial and strategic importance. The strategic significance of the strait was one of the factors in the decision of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great to found there in AD 330 his new capital, Constantinople (today Istanbul), which came to be known as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. In 1452, Mehmet the Conqueror ordered the construction of the mighty fortresses of Rumelihisari (Fortress of Europe) and Anadoluhisari (Fortress of Anatolia), so he could control the strait and prevent reinforcements from reaching the besieged Byzantine capital of Constantinople. The most impressive sights along the shores of the Bosphorus are the Topkapi Palace, the Maiden's Tower (Kız Kulesi), and Dolmabahçe Palace, several Ottoman palaces, fortresses, forested hills, and shore villages with Ottoman architecture.

Transfer time: 1 hour. Transfer distance: 45 km (Hotel in Sultanahmet – Belgrade Forest)

Overnight: Centrum Hotel – <http://hotelcentrumistanbul.com> – or similar, Istanbul

Day 3. Istanbul – Hagia Sophia, Blue Mosque, Hippodrome Square, Grand Bazaar – Antalya

Istanbul, formerly known as Constantinople, was the hub of the Ottoman Empire, and many of the grand buildings of this period are still present today. You could easily spend a week in this city and still not have seen all the sites. Today we will explore the old Sultanahmet (Old City) district. We'll visit the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque; the Hippodrome Square, and the Grand Bazaar.

The Hagia Sophia is a former Orthodox patriarchal basilica, later a mosque, and now a museum. From the date of its dedication in 360 until 1453 it served as the cathedral of Constantinople, except between 1204 and 1261, when it was converted to a Roman Catholic cathedral under the Latin Patriarch of Constantinople of the western-crusaders-established Latin Empire. The building was a mosque from 1453 until 1931, when it was secularized. It was opened as a museum in February 1935.

The Blue Mosque (Sultan Ahmed Mosque) was built between 1609 and 1616. The design of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque is the culmination of two centuries of both Ottoman mosque and Byzantine church development. It incorporates some Byzantine elements of the neighboring Hagia Sophia with traditional Islamic architecture and is considered to be the last great mosque of the classical period. The architect has ably synthesized the ideas of his master Mimar Sinan, aiming for overwhelming size, majesty, and splendor.

The Hippodrome of Constantinople was a circus that was the sporting and social center of Constantinople, capital of the Byzantine Empire. Today it is a square named Sultanahmet Meydani (Sultanahmet Square). Although the Hippodrome is usually associated with

Constantinople's days of glory as an imperial capital, it actually predates that era. The surviving monuments of the spina (the middle barrier of the racecourse), the two obelisks (Obelisk of Theodosius and Walled Obelisk) and the Serpent Column, now sit in holes in a landscaped garden.

The Grand Bazaar (Kapalı Çarşı) in Istanbul is one of the largest and oldest covered markets in the world, with 61 covered streets and more than 3,000 shops, which attract between 250,000 and 400,000 visitors daily.

In the late afternoon or early evening we drive to the Istanbul Atatürk Airport and fly to Antalya. It is uncertain when the site of the current city of Antalya was first inhabited. Attalos II Philadelphus, king of Pergamon, was believed to have founded the city around 150 BC, naming it Attalia and selecting it as a naval base for his powerful fleet. However, excavations have uncovered remains dating to the 3rd century BC, suggesting that the city was founded earlier than previously thought. Antalya became part of the Roman Republic in 133 BC, when King Attalos III of Pergamon willed his kingdom to Rome at his death. The city grew and prospered during the Roman period and includes sites with traces of Lycian, Pamphylian, and Hellenistic – but mainly Roman, Byzantine, Seljuk, and Ottoman – architecture and cultures. We'll spend the night in the historic center of Antalya, the Kaleiçi.

Transfer time: 30 minutes. Transfer distance: 18 km (Hotel in Sultanahmet – Istanbul Atatürk Airport)

Transfer time: 20 minutes. Transfer distance: 11 km (Antalya airport – hotel in the Kaleiçi district)

Overnight: Castle Boutique Hotel – <http://www.castleboutiquehotel.com> – or similar, Antalya

Day 4. Antalya – Oymapinar Dam – Taşucu

Very early in the morning we will drive to the Oymapinar Dam, also known as the Green Canyon. We will have a boat trip on the Oymapinar Dam, searching for **Brown Fish Owl** at a recently discovered site and at the extreme western edge of its range. Afterwards we drive to Taşucu, where we'll spend the night.

Transfer time: 1 ½ hours. Transfer distance: 90 km (Antalya – Oymapinar Dam)

Transfer time: 6 hours. Transfer distance: 325 km. (Oymapinar Dam – Taşucu)

Overnight: Zeus Hotel – <http://zeusoteltasucu.com> – or similar, Taşucu

Day 5. Taşucu – Göksu Delta

We will have an early morning start for the Göksu Delta, which is a prime habitat for waterbirds. With over 335 species recorded here, it is the most famous place for birdwatching in Turkey. We'll explore the wetland and look for some specialties here, including **Marbled Duck**, **Purple Swamphen**, and **Black Francolin**, as well as many migrating waders. Additionally we should be able to find **Audouin's Gull**, **Spur-winged Lapwing**, **Moustached Warbler**, **Graceful Prinia**, **Pygmy Cormorant**, **Collared Pratincole**, **White-spectacled Bulbul**, pelicans, and many different passerines along our route. Keeping our eyes on the sky for **Eleonora's Falcon**, we'll explore the Göksu Delta. Afterwards we will drive back to Taşucu, where we will spend the night.

Transfer time: 1 hour. Transfer distance: 45 km (Taşucu – Göksu Delta)

Overnight: Zeus Hotel – <http://zeusoteltasucu.com> – or similar, Taşucu

Day 6. Taşucu – Taurus Mountains – Aladaglar National Park

In the morning after breakfast we'll head to the north Aladaglar region and cross the Taurus Mountains. Depending on our arrival time we can begin to explore and walk up a spectacular gorge, which should produce **Wallcreeper**, **Red-billed Chough**, **Ring Ouzel**, **Red-fronted Serin**, and **Rock Partridge**. Later we will drive to our accommodation, where we will stay for two nights. We'll enjoy our dinner, with some homegrown food and views of the magnificent Demirkazik peak.

Transfer time: 4 hours. Transfer distance: 270 km (Taşucu – Aladaglar Demirkazik)

Overnight: Mountain House – or similar, Demirkazik

Day 7. Aladaglar National Park

We'll have a very early start this morning for an exceptional birding day. We ascend a rough track to 1,500m (and possibly to 3,000m, depending on the seasonal snow level) by tractor and trailer. Getting to our observation point by the first light will allow us to find the elusive **Caspian Snowcock** more easily. Here we can enjoy our morning tea and coffee and a light breakfast. In the area there are many other alpine species, including **Radde's** and **Alpine Accentors**, **Alpine** and **Red-billed Choughs**, **Eurasian Crimson-winged Finch**, and **White-winged Snowfinch**. Later we descend and have a traditional breakfast, or possibly lunch, depending on the time and the altitude we have reached. Some interesting species can also be found near and next to our accommodation, including **Rosy Starling**.

Overnight: Mountain House – or similar, Demirkazik

Day 8. Aladaglar National Park – Sultan Marsh – World Heritage Cappadocia

In the morning we will discover the Aladaglar region and head to Sultansazligi Nature Reserve (Sultan Marsh), one of the most important breeding areas in the country. This is a rare ecosystem where salt and fresh waters coexist, and this is the only place in Turkey where **Common Crane**, **Greater Flamingo**, herons, and **Great White Pelican** breed together. The reserve is home to more than 300 different bird species, of which 85 species breed here. At Sultan Marsh it is possible to see several waterbirds, **Pygmy Cormorant**, **Dalmatian Pelican**, **Little Bittern**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **White Stork**, **Black Stork**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Glossy Ibis**, thousands of **Greater Flamingos**, **Gadwall**, **White-headed Duck**, **Greater Sand Plover**, **Pied Avocet**, **Mediterranean Gull**, **Slender-billed Gull**, and **Gull-billed Tern**, as well as **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, **Lesser Short-toed Lark**, and **Isabelline Wheatear** on the steppes surrounding the marsh.

Afterwards we'll continue to Cappadocia. Cappadocia is undeniably a nature fantasy, and it almost feels like another planet with its exceptional geological formations. In this creation of nature, the otherworldliness of the landscapes is added to its historical richness. Wind, rain, and frost have sculpted this superb scenery in the volcanic rock during millions of years. The region is largely underlain by sedimentary rocks formed in lakes and streams, and ignimbrite deposits erupted from ancient volcanoes. The rocks of Cappadocia eroded into hundreds of spectacular pillars and forms.

Transfer time: 1 hour. Transfer distance: 60 km (Sultan Marsh – Cappadocia)

Overnight: Gül Konaklari – Sinasos – <http://www.gulkonaklari.dinler.com> – or Upper Greek House Hotel – <http://www.uppergreekhouse.com> – or similar, Mustafapaşa

Day 9. World Heritage Cappadocia: Göreme Open Air Museum, Red Valley, Avanos – Adana

Optional Activity: Hot Air Balloon. In the early morning before sunrise it is optionally possible to take a hot air balloon flight. Cappadocia is regarded as one of the world's best balloon flight areas, and this is one of the best ways to discover the unique landscapes of this impressive wonder of nature.

In the morning we'll start today's activities with a walk to explore one of the most beautiful valleys in Cappadocia. The Christian people at the heart of Cappadocia realized that the soft rocks could be easily carved out to form houses, churches, and monasteries. These Christian sanctuaries contain many examples of Byzantine art from the post-iconoclastic period. The frescoes inside the Göreme Open Air Museum represent a unique artistic achievement from this period. After visiting the Göreme Open Air Museum we'll take time to explore the Red Valley, the most beautiful valley in Cappadocia, with its spectacular rock formations and colors. In the Red Valley it is possible, depending on walking pace and time, to visit some hidden churches like the Uzumlu (Grape) Church, Hacli Kilise (Church with the Cross), and Üc Hacli Kilise (Church with the Three Crosses). These churches have been carved out of the cliff face, and, although this is not definite, the common belief is that they date back to the 8th or 9th century. The decorative reliefs and frescoes were added in the 10th and 11th centuries..

Walking time: 2 hours. Walking distance: 5 – 6 km. Ascent: 45m. Descent: 160m

Afterwards we'll visit the Cappadocian town of Avanos.

The most famous historical feature of Avanos, which is still relevant and very visible today, is its production of earthenware pottery; this is also the main economic activity in the town. The ceramic trade in this district and its countless pottery factories date right back to the Hittites, and the ceramic clay from the red silt of the Kızılırmak (Red River) has always been used. We will take time to visit one of the pottery studios, and you will try to shape something on your own.

Turkish carpets and rugs, whether hand-knotted or flat-woven, are among the most well-known and established hand-crafted works of art in the world. Historically religious, cultural, environmental, socio-political, and socioeconomic conditions created widespread utilitarian needs and provided artistic inspiration among the many tribal peoples and ethnic groups in Central Anatolia and Turkey. Every carpet through its patterns resembles a collection of messages, beliefs, and symbols. They are declarations of wishes, in which all expectations are enshrined. Every pattern that is woven into a carpet is a picture of a feeling, a desire, or a wish. Every carpet represents a living history from the early ages to the present, in which women have patiently and untiringly written their joys and sorrows in amazing codes and magic letters, which are to be read line by line. The carpets contain voices of birds, voices of children, gently blowing spring winds, flowers, branches, figures, whims, and wishes. We will also visit a carpet weaving facility, watching this fascinating activity.

In the late afternoon we'll leave Cappadocia and drive to Adana, where we will spend the night.

Transfer time: 3 – 4 hours. Transfer distance: 260 km (Cappadocia – Adana)

Overnight: Adana Plaza Hotel – <http://www.adanaplazaotel.com> – or similar, Adana

Day 10. Adana – Tuzla and Yumurtalik Lagoon – Gaziantep

After breakfast we'll leave Adana and drive to Gaziantep by visiting Tuzla and Yumurtalik on the way. Tuzla is known as a bird paradise, home to hundreds of birds; among others we might encounter **White-spectacled Bulbul**, **Graceful Prinia**, **White-throated** and **Pied Kingfishers**, **Western Cattle** and **Little Egrets**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Pygmy Cormorant**, **Greater Flamingo**, **Common Shelduck**, **Little Ringed** and **Kentish Plovers**, and **Slender-billed Gull**.

Then we will visit the Yumurtalik area, part of the Çukurova Delta, with many lagoons. Here **Collared Pratincole, Little and Gull-billed Terns, Greater Short-toed Lark, Dead Sea Sparrow, Zitting Cisticola, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, and Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** might be seen.

In the late afternoon we'll continue to Gaziantep, where we'll spend the night.

Transfer time: 4 hours. Transfer distance: 295 km (Adana – Gaziantep via Tuzla and Yumurtalik Lagoon)

Overnight: Tilmen Hotel – <http://www.hoteltilmen.com.tr> – or similar, Gaziantep

Day 11. Gaziantep – Işikli and Durnalik

In the morning after breakfast we will stop at dry oak scrub (the landscape here is spectacular, called moonland) near Işikli and Durnalik to look for **Red-tailed Wheatear and Upcher's Warbler**, together with **White-throated Robin, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Western and Eastern Rock Nuthatches, Cretzschmar's Bunting, Sombre Tit, and Cinereous Bunting. Saker Falcon** is possible here too. Afterwards we'll return to Gaziantep, where we will spend the night.

Transfer time: 30 – 40 minutes. Transfer distance: 40 km (Gaziantep - Işikli and Durnalik / one way)

Overnight: Tilmen Hotel – <http://www.hoteltilmen.com.tr> – or similar, Gaziantep

Day 12. Gaziantep – Birecik, Halfeti, and Kizilkuyu – Şanlıurfa (Urfa)

In the early morning we will visit Birecik and Halfeti, the most-visited areas by birders along the River Euphrates and home to Northern Bald Ibis. Birecik and Halfeti are very rich areas of rare habitats and birds. Pistachio orchards, woods along the river Euphrates (Firat), and calcareous wadis are home to **Northern Bald Ibis, Little Swift, Pallid Scops Owl, Upcher's and Menetries's Warblers, Dead Sea Sparrow, Yellow-throated Sparrow, Pale Rockfinch, and Desert Finch**. We will also visit a site for a colony of **Iraq Babblers**.

At noon we will arrive at the semi-desert habitats of Kizilkuyu, where the wild Goitered Gazelles run freely, just near the city of Şanlıurfa. **See-see Partridge, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Cream-colored Courser, Lesser Short-toed Lark, Pale Rockfinch, Finsch's Wheatear, and Desert and Trumpeter Finches** are highlights here.

Afterwards we continue to Şanlıurfa, a city with a mixed Arab, Kurdish, and Turkish population. Modern Urfa presents contrasts between its old and new quarters, and the old town is one of the most evocative and romantic in Turkey. In Şanlıurfa it is possible to explore the old city center with its old traditional courtyard houses and narrow streets. A highlight in the city center is the legendary Pool of Sacred Fish (Balıklı Gölü), where Abraham was thrown into the fire by Nimrod. The pool is in the courtyard of the Halil-ur Rahman Mosque, built by the Ayyubids in 1211 and now surrounded by an attractive garden. The courtyard is where the fish thrive. A local legend says that seeing a white fish will open the door to the heavens. We'll spend the night in Urfa.

Transfer time: 2 – 3 hours. Transfer distance: 160 km (Gaziantep – Şanlıurfa via Birecik and Kizilkuyu)

Overnight: Arte Hotel – <http://www.otel-arte.com> – or similar, Şanlıurfa

Day 13. Şanlıurfa – Atatürk Dam – Adiyaman and Kâhta/Karadut – Mount Nemrut and statues

In the morning we will drive to Kâhta via Adiyaman. On the way we will have a short stop at the Atatürk Dam, one of the world's largest dams. We'll continue via Adiyaman to Kâhta and visit the Statues of Nemrut. Mount Nemrut is one of the most astounding sites in Turkey: A collection of colossal statues on a remote mountain, 2150m high, adorn the temple and tomb of King Antiochus I. The site was unknown until 1881 but has since then been a significant historical and cultural attraction. Mount Nemrut is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

At the outskirts of Mount Nemrut it is possible to see **Alpine Swift, Greater Short-toed Lark, Tawny Pipit, White-throated Robin, Red-tailed, Finsch's, and Black-eared Wheatears, Common Rock Thrush, Eastern Orphean and Upcher's Warblers, Pale Rockfinch, White-winged Snowfinch, Eurasian Crimson-winged Finch, and Cinereous Bunting.**

Afterwards we'll continue to one of the villages of Karadut or Kâhta, where we'll spend the night.

Transfer time: 2 – 3 hours. Transfer distance: 180 km (Urfa – Kâhta/Karadut via Atatürk Dam)

Transfer time: 15 minutes. Transfer distance: 15 km (Karadut village – Mount Nemrut)

Overnight: Euphrates Hotel – <http://www.hoteleuphratnemrut.com> – or similar, Karadut, or Zeus Hotel – <http://www.zeushotel.com.tr> – or similar, Kâhta

Day 14. Kâhta /Karadut – Diyarbakir – sightseeing Diyarbakir city centre

After breakfast we'll leave Kâhta/Karadut and drive to Diyarbakir. Our first adventure today will be taking the Kâhta – Siverek ferryboat to cross over the Euphrates River.

On the way to Diyarbakir we will visit the Malabadi Bridge, an arch bridge spanning the Batman River near the town of Silvan. It was built between 1146 and 1147 during the Artuqid dynasty by Timurtas of Mardin, son of Ilgazi, grandson of Artuq. It was restored in the late 12th century and recently again, at the beginning of the 20th century. It was once the only bridge across the river in this area and was in continuous use until the 1950s, when a new road bridge was opened upstream.

Afterwards we continue to Diyarbakir, check into our hotel, and have lunch at the restaurant.

In the afternoon we take time to explore the city center of Diyarbakir. Diyarbakir, known in ancient times as Amida, has been a cradle of 26 civilizations during its 5000 year history. The city is spread across a basalt plateau close to the banks of the Tigris River. Diyarbakir is surrounded by an almost intact, dramatic set of high walls of black basalt, forming a 5.5 km (3.4 miles) circle around the old city. There are four gates into the old city and 82 watch-towers on the walls, which were built in antiquity and restored and extended by the Roman emperor Constantius II. In the city centre it is possible to visit Ulu Camii (the Grand Mosque), a piece of history, which was built in 1179 by Melik Nasreddin Mehmet, the Virgin Mary Church, constructed as a pagan temple, restored many times, and still in use as a place of worship today, and Mar Petyun Keldani Church, a 17th century Chaldean Catholic church.

Transfer Time: 3 hours. Transfer distance: 150 km (Kâhta/Karadut – Diyarbakir; with using the Kâhta – Siverek ferryboat)

Overnight: Kervansaray Hotel – <http://www.kervansarayotel.com.tr> – or similar, Diyarbakir

Day 15. Diyarbakir – Hasankeyf – Tatvan

In the morning after breakfast we'll leave Diyarbakir and drive to Tatvan.

On the way we will take time to visit Hasankeyf, an ancient town on the Tigris River, declared a natural conservation area by Turkey in 1981. The city has been identified with the Ilanşura of the Mari Tablets (c. 1800 BC). The Romans had built the Cephe fortress on the site, then the city

became the Kiphas fortress, and later a bishopric under the Byzantine Empire. It was conquered by the Arabs in ca. 640 and renamed Hisn Kayf. Hasankeyf is rich in history throughout the ages, and thousands of caves exist in the cliffs that surround the city. Many of the caves are multi-storied and water-supplied. Churches and mosques were also carved into the cliffs, and numerous ancient cemeteries exist throughout the area as well.

In Hasankeyf it is possible to walk a little along the opposite bank of the Tigris, where you can meet with a little bit of luck **European Goldfinch**, **Common Swift**, **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, and, best of all, **Lesser Kestrel**.

Afterwards we'll continue to Tatvan, where we'll spend the night.

Transfer time: 4 – 5 hours. Transfer distance: 320 km (Diyarbakir – Tatvan via Hasankeyf)

Overnight: Kardelen Hotel or Mostar Hotel – <http://www.tatvanmostarhotel.com> – or similar, Tatvan

Day 16. Tatvan – Lake Sodali Gol – Doğubeyazit, Ishak Pasha Palace

Today our first stop will be at the splendid but small Lake Sodali Gol, which is located near Lake Van and at the foothills of Mount Süphan. Lake Sodali Gol has soda, like its big brother, Lake Van, plus some sandy parts, marshes, and muddy surfaces. It is surrounded by villages, but the locals are friendly with birds and birders here, so the birds are very tame. We'll look for numerous species like **White-headed Duck**, **White-winged Tern**, **Whiskered Tern**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Greater Sand Plover**, **Curlew** and **Terek Sandpipers**, **Pied Avocet**, **Sand Martin**, **Black-necked Grebe**, **Yellow Wagtail**, and **Slender-billed** and **Armenian Gulls**.

Then we'll continue to Doğubeyazit. Doğubeyazit is a settlement with a long history. It lies 15 km southwest of Mount Ararat and 35 km from the Iranian border. The area has had a rich history since it was settled during the times of the first Armenian Kingdom of Urartu. The area was subsequently conquered by Persians, Romans, Arabs, and Byzantines, all of whom would have used the plain to rest and recoup during their passages across the mountains.

After having lunch in a restaurant in Doğubeyazit we'll visit the Ishak Pasha Palace. The palace is built on a hill at the side of a mountain 5 km (3 miles) east of Doğubeyazit. It was the last large monumental structure in the Ottoman Empire from the Lâle Devri period (early 18th century). It is one of the most distinguished and magnificent examples of 18th century Ottoman architecture and very valuable in terms of art history. The rocky hills around the palace hold **Mongolian Finch**, **Grey-necked Bunting**, **Common Rock Thrush**, **Black Redstart**, **Tree Pipit**, and **Horned Lark** as well.

Transfer time: 1 – 2 hours. Transfer distance: 90 km (Tatvan – Lake Sodali Gol)

Transfer time: 3 hours. Transfer distance: 180 km (Lake Sodali Gol – Doğubeyazit)

Overnight: Simer Hotel – <http://www.simerhotel.com> – or similar, Doğubeyazit

Day 17. Doğubeyazit – Çaldıran Plain and Mount Tendürek – Muradiye Waterfalls – Bendimahı Marshes – Van

In the early morning we will drive to the northwest shore of Lake Van and visit the lava fields of Mount Tendürek with the meadows of the Çaldıran Plain, which are inhabited by **Citrine Wagtail**, **Eurasian Crimson-winged Finch**, **White-winged Snowfinch**, **Bluethroat**, Turkish Twite (the local subspecies of **European Goldfinch**), **Common Rosefinch**, **Black-headed** and **Ortolan Bunting**, **White-throated Dipper**, **Bimaculated Lark**, **Common Sandpiper**, and **Marsh Warbler**. **Montagu's Harrier** is also possible.

On our way to Van we will take time to visit Muradiye Waterfalls. The falls are around 10m high, and a bridge suspended over the river gives you a great view of the falls. After having some tea with the harmony of the peaceful water surrounding us we'll drive to the Bendimahi Marshes at the northern edge of Lake Van. Here we might see **Paddyfield Warbler**, **Rosy Starling**, **Common Reed Bunting**, and several gulls and terns. The fields hold **Calandra** and **Greater Short-toed Larks** and **Long-legged Buzzard**.

Afterwards we carry on to Van. Archaeological excavations and surveys carried out in the Van province and environs prove that the history of the city itself goes back as far as 5000 BC. Under the ancient name of Tushpa, Van was the capital of the Urartian kingdom in the 9th century BC. We will spend the night in Van.

Transfer time: 3 hours. Transfer distance: 180 km (Doğubeyazit – Van)

Overnight: Tamara Hotel or similar, Van

Day 18. Van – Lake Erçek – Akdamar Island and church – Van Fortress

In the morning after breakfast we'll drive to a small lake located to the east of Van, Lake Erçek. **Armenian Gull** is very common here, and we also we will have chances to see **Ruddy Shelduck**, **White-headed Duck**, **Black-necked Grebe**, **Black-headed Bunting**, **Common Pochard**, and **Marsh, Terek**, and **Broad-billed Sandpipers**.

In the afternoon we drive to Gevaş and take a ferryboat to visit Akdamar Island, a small island in Lake Van, which is home to a 10th century Armenian church, known as the Church of the Holy Cross, which was the seat of an Armenian Catholic bishopric from 1116 to 1895. The unique importance of the Church of the Holy Cross is based in the extensive array of bas-relief carving of mostly biblical scenes that adorn its external walls.

After visiting Akdamar Island we'll drive back to Van and visit the Van Fortress, constructed by the Urartian king Sardur. One of the most remarkable structures in this area is the rock tomb of Argishti I, the sixth known king of Urartu, reigning from 786 BC to 764 BC. Outside the tomb is a long inscription relating the events of his reign. The Van Fortress is a massive stone fortification built during the ancient kingdom of Urartu in the 9th to 7th centuries BC and is the largest example of its kind. It overlooks the ruins of Tushpa, the ancient Urartian capital during the 9th century, which was centered upon the steep-sided bluff where the fortress now sits.

Transfer time: 45 minutes. Transfer distance: 40 km (Van – Lake Erçek)

Transfer time: 30 minutes. Transfer distance: 45 km (Van – Gevaş)

Ferryboat: 20 – 25 minutes to Akdamar Island, one way

Overnight: Tamara Hotel or similar, Van

Day 19. Van – Istanbul – afternoon at leisure

In the morning we'll drive to the Van airport and fly to Istanbul. From Istanbul Atatürk Airport we continue to our hotel in the Sultanahmet area. The afternoon in Istanbul is at leisure to allow you to explore the city on your own.

Recommended places (sights) worth a visit are: the Topkapi Palace and the Istanbul Archaeology Museums, the Basilica Cistern, the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum, the Great Palace Mosaic Museum, and the Spice Bazaar – all these places are located in the Sultanahmet district and within 5 – 10 minutes distance to your hotel.

Recommended to walk across the Galata Bridge to the Taksim Square and Beyoğlu: major shopping, tourist, and leisure district famed for its restaurants and shops and considered the heart of modern Istanbul.

Recommended to take the ferry from Eminönü/Sirkeci to Kadiköy on the Asian side: Kadiköy is a busy shopping district with a wide variety of atmospheres and architectural styles. It has many narrow streets filled with cafés and restaurants, and the market area is mostly closed to traffic and contains a wide variety of traditional Turkish restaurants, patisseries, wine houses, and bars (pubs) with jazz and folk music.

Transfer time: 15 minutes. Transfer distance: 15 km (hotel in Van – Van airport)

Transfer time: 30 minutes. Transfer distance: 18 km (Istanbul Atatürk Airport – hotel in Sultanahmet)

Overnight: Centrum Hotel – <http://hotelcentrumistanbul.com> – or similar, Istanbul

Day 20. Istanbul – Home

After breakfast you will be transferred to the Istanbul Atatürk Airport for your flights homewards.

Transfer time: 30 minutes. Transfer distance: 18 km (hotel in Sultanahmet – Istanbul Atatürk Airport)

Duration: 20 Days
Group Size: 4 – 8
Date: 23 May – 11 June 2019
Start: Istanbul
End: Istanbul

Price: €5262 sharing, assuming 6 – 8 participants,
 €6556 sharing, assuming 4 – 5 participants

Single Supplement: €652

Price includes:

All transfers and transportation in a private, air-conditioned vehicle

Days 1, 3 and 19, 20: Organized arrival/departure group transfers from/to Istanbul Atatürk Airport

Accommodation on a twin share basis

All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 20

Guiding fees

Entrance fees for the natural and historical sites mentioned in the itinerary

Ferryboat Kâhta – Siverek

Ferryboat Akdamar Island

Rowboat in the Sultan Marsh

Boat trips mentioned in the itinerary

Price excludes:

International flights

Domestic flights (Istanbul – Antalya, Van – Istanbul)

Travel insurance

Extra transport and transfers other than those stated in the itinerary

All drinks, bottled water, tea and coffee

All kinds of personal expenses

Entrance fees for historical and natural sites other than those stated in the itinerary

All optional activities (Cappadocia) and recommended sights (Istanbul)

Extra nights

Tips

Personal and necessary equipment

Necessary equipment:

Trekking shoes – recommended: trekking boots, good profiled (Vibram), water-repellent (Gore-Tex)

Walking clothes (wind stopper, water-repellent)

Daily backpack (minimum 25 – 30 liter volume)

Headlight

Sun protection cream

Sunglasses