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**Cappadocia**
Surreal fairy chimneys and cave dwellings (p449)

**Sumela Monastery**
Cliff-face monastery surveys valleys (p516)

**Ani**
Eerie ruins of a former Armenian capital (p552)

**Konya**
Dervishes whirl at the Mevlâna Festival (p438)

**Nemrut Dağı (Mt Nemrut)**
Giant stone heads litter a mountain (p583)
itineraries

Whether you’ve got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.

One to Two Weeks

**Classic Turkey**

Most first-time visitors to Turkey arrive with two ancient names on their lips: İstanbul and Ephesus. You’ll need at least three days in the continent-straddling megacity to even scrape the surface of its millennia of history. Without a doubt, the top three sights are the Aya Sofya, Topkapı Palace and Blue Mosque but there’s a sultan’s treasury of other sights and activities, including a cruise up the Bosphorus to the Black Sea (Karadeniz), the nightlife around the heaving İstiklal Caddesi and the Grand Bazaar’s 4000-plus shops.

You can head straight to İzmir, near Ephesus, on the ferry and train, but if you have time, meander via the Gallipoli Peninsula, most pleasantly reached on the ferry and bus via Çanakkale. An afternoon tour of the poignant battlefields, still haunted by ghosts of the WWI campaign, is a memorable experience. The north Aegean is rich in ruins and you could climb the hill to the Temple of Athena at Behramkale, but you may prefer to relax in tumbledown Ayvalık and save your energy for glorious Ephesus, the best-preserved classical city in the eastern Mediterranean.
Decisions, decisions. Travellers are often confronted with a tough choice when deciding where to head for in Turkey: Cappadocia or the coast. If you feel drawn to the former’s fairytale landscape, follow the previous itinerary in İstanbul and hop on a fast train to the Turkish capital or, with more time, bus along the top of the country to Safranbolu. This Ottoman town, with half-timbered houses among rocky bluffs, is a wonderful introduction to rural Anatolian life.

 Ankara is no match for that show-stealer on the Bosphorus, but two key sights here give an insight into Turkish history, ancient and modern: the Anıt Kabir, Atatürk’s hilltop mausoleum, and the Museum of Anatolian Civilisations, a restored 15th-century bedesten (covered market) packed with finds from the surrounding steppe. Tying in with the latter, a detour east of Ankara takes in the isolated, evocative ruins of Hattuşa, the Hittite capital in the late Bronze age.

Leave three days to explore Cappadocia, where there are valleys of fairy chimneys (rock formations) and rock-cut churches with Byzantine frescoes, underground cities and horse-riding to get through. You also need to leave time to just sit and appreciate the fantastical landscape in çay-drinking villages such as Mustafapaşa, with its stone-carved Greek houses and stone grapevine on the 18th-century church.
Three to Four Weeks

**Eastern Delights**

Head south from buzzing Trabzon to **Sumela Monastery**, which peers down on a forested valley from its rockface. The onward route is best tackled by car to appreciate the scenery, particularly the valleys of medieval **Georgian churches** after Erzurum. Around the rafting and trekking centre of **Yusufeli**, the drive is one of Turkey’s most scenic, heading over mountains, through gorges and past crumbling castles.

**Ani** is the star attraction of Russian-influenced **Kars**; once a thriving Armenian capital, it’s now a field strewn with magnificent ruins next to the border of modern Armenia. Next, head south to the predominantly Kurdish town of **Doğubayazıt**, nicknamed ‘doggy biscuit’ by travellers on the hippie trail. Six kilometres uphill from town, the almost impossibly romantic **İshak Paşa Palace** surveys the plains near the Iranian border.

Further south is **Van**, on the southeastern shore of a vast, mountain-ringed lake. Make sure you eat lots of the famously tasty local **kahvaltı** (breakfast) because there are numerous sights to get through, including the 10th-century **Akdamar church**, the sole inhabitant of an island in Lake Van (Van Gölü), and the recently restored **Hoşap Castle**. Heading west, don’t miss **Hasankeyf**, with its rock-cut castle by the Tigris River, and honey-coloured **Mardin**, overlooking the roasting Mesopotamian plains.

Head northwest and enter the Byzantine city walls at **Diyarbakır**, the heartland of Kurdish culture, then climb **Nemrut Dağı** (Mt Nemrut) to see the gigantic stone heads. Finish near the Syrian border in **Harran**, which hosted Abraham in 1900 BC and is one of the oldest continuously inhabited spots on earth.
If you have a kind boss, you don’t have to choose between Cappadocia’s wavy valleys and the coast’s white-sand beaches – prepare to spend many hours on buses and check out both areas. Follow our first itinerary, plus, to see some of Turkey’s most awe-inspiring Roman ruins, stop in Pergamum, the empire’s pre-eminent medical centre, and climb the hill to the acropolis.

After Ephesus, take a day trip from your base at Selçuk to the travertines and ruins of Hierapolis at Pamukkale. The brilliant white terraces can be dizzying in the midday sun, but swimming among submerged marble columns in the Antique Pool will restore your cool. Nearby Afrodisias is at least as impressive and less crowded – the only other people among the soaring colonnades might be archaeologists.

Returning to the coast, head along the chichi Bodrum Peninsula or the Datça and Bozburun Peninsulas, where the mountain towns and fishing villages are best explored by scooter. Continuing southeast, beautiful Ölüdeniz is the spot to paraglide over the Mediterranean or lie low on a beach towel. You’re now within kicking distance of the 509km-long Lycian Way. Hike for a day through superb countryside to overnight in heavenly Faralya, overlooking Butterfly Valley, and further inroads into the trail will definitely top your ‘next time’ list.

Continuing along the coast, have a pit stop at laid-back Kaş, its pretty harbourside square alive nightly with the hum of friendly folk enjoying the breeze, views, boutique browsing and a beer or two. One of Turkey’s most beguiling boat trips departs from here, taking in the sunken Byzantine city at Kekova Island. From Kaş, it’s a couple of hours to Olympos, where you can spend a few days unwinding at the beach tree houses.

Back in the city, Antalya’s Roman-Ottoman quarter, Kaleiçi, is worth a wander against the backdrop of a jaw-dropping mountain range. Next, drag yourself away from the beach and catch the bus north to claim your cave in Göreme. This travellers’ hang-out is the most popular base in Cappadocia, a surreal moonscape dotted with often-phallic tuff cones. The famous formations line the roads to sights including the rock-cut frescoed churches of Göreme Open-Air Museum and the Byzantine underground cities at Kaymaklı and Derinkuyu.
Four Weeks

Anatolian Circle

This trip only leaves out eastern Anatolia, a mission in itself, and takes in obscure gems as well as prime sights, including Edirne’s Selimiye Camii. The 16th-century mosque is the finest work of the great Mimar Sinan. Next, spend a few days among more mosques, palaces and some 13 million folk in İstanbul, former capital of the Ottoman and Byzantine empires, before heading east to Safranbolu, with its winding streets of Ottoman mansions. From here, turn north to Amasra, which is a low-key Black Sea port town, but more importantly the beginning of the drive to Sinop through rugged hills.

South of Samsun, Amasya matches Safranbolu with its Ottoman houses, as well as having Pontic tombs, a castle and less of a tourist industry. Heading south, pause in Sivas and detour up a mountain valley to Divriği, an Alevi town that offers a taste of eastern Anatolia. The 800-year-old, Unesco-protected Ulu Cami mosque and hospital complex has stone doorways with intricate carvings.

The next stop, Cappadocia, is wholeheartedly back on the beaten track. However, instead of joining the rest on a tour bus or hot-air balloon, explore the fairy chimneys and cave churches by walking or horse-riding. Göreme and Ürgüp are the usual bases, but you could stay in a less-touristy village such as Ortahisar, with its craggy castle.

South of central Cappadocia, see rock-cut churches without the worst of the crowds in Soğanlı, where Byzantine monastic settlements occupy two valleys. If you really want to get away from it all, head into the Ala Dağlar National Park for some of Turkey’s most breathtaking scenery in the Taurus Mountains (Toros Dağları).

You’re now fit for the journey across the hazy plains to Konya, a convenient stop en route to the Mediterranean and the birthplace of the Mevlâna (whirling dervish) order. The turquoise-domed Mevlâna Museum, containing the tomb of the order’s 13th-century founder, is an enduring symbol of Turkey.

When you glimpse the glittering Med, follow the coastal part of the previous itinerary. You won’t have time to stop everywhere if you want to sunbathe and hit the hamam – Antalya’s Seljuk Sefa Hamam is a good one – so pick some highlights, such as the ruins at Kekova Island, Ephesus and Pergamum.
OUR STORY
A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, Across Asia on the Cheap. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

OUR WRITERS

James Bainbridge
Coordinating Author; Thrace & Marmara, Izmir & the North Aegean The last few years have been all about Turkey for James. While coordinating the previous edition of Turkey, he researched Cappadocia and Central Anatolia, then wrote up his kebab-stained notes at home in Hackney, a Turkish enclave of London. For this edition he moved to Istanbul. When he hasn’t been learning to love suffixes on a Turkish course, or sitting among Mac-toting artists in Cihangir’s trendy cafes, he has written about the city for worldwide publications. James’ travel writing on Turkey, and other countries from India to Ireland, has appeared in a dozen Lonely Planet guidebooks and publications including the Times and the Guardian.

Brett Atkinson
Black Sea Coast & the Kaçkar Mountains, Southeastern Anatolia Since first visiting Turkey in 1985, Brett Atkinson has returned regularly to one of his favourite countries. Highlights have included ballooning in Cappadocia, discovering the poignant remains of Ani and Afrodisias, and honeymooning with Carol in Istanbul. For this research trip he visited southeastern Anatolia for the first time, and the region’s stunning scenery, Kurdish culture, and excellent food didn’t disappoint. Brett has written about over 40 different countries as a guidebook author and travel writer. See www.brett-atkinson.net.

Jean-Bernard Carillet
Northeastern Anatolia A Paris-based journalist and photographer, Jean-Bernard has a passion for remote corners and adventure-laden regions – small wonder then that he keeps returning to northeastern Anatolia. He has clocked up five trips there, and each time the area has woven its spell on him a little more (despite a couple of major rental car breakdowns). Seeking out churches and castles of yore lost in the steppe or perched on cliff tops, climbing majestic summits (including Mt Ararat), hiking in the Kaçkars, rafting the Ispir River – he can’t think of a better playground.

Steve Fallon
Antalya & the Western Mediterranean, Eastern Mediterranean Owning a house in Kalkan and being on first-name basis with most of the Turkish Airline inflight staff currently flying between London and Dalaman, Steve considers Turkey a second home. This assignment took him from the hotspots of Marmaris to the hotchpot that is Hatay where he discovered the joys of fresh thyme salad, castles that walk on water and early Christianity. And although Türkçe’yi hala mağara adamlı gibi konuşuyor (he still speaks Turkish like a caveman), he says only nice things in his new favourite language.

Read more about Steve at: lonelyplanet.com/members/stevefallon

OVERPAGE MORE WRITERS

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Virginia Maxwell

**Istanbul** After working for many years as a publishing manager at Lonely Planet’s Melbourne headquarters, Virginia decided that she’d be happier writing guidebooks than commissioning them. Since making this decision she’s covered nine countries for Lonely Planet, most of them around the Mediterranean. Virginia knows Turkey well, and loves it with a passion. As well as working on the previous three editions of this country guide, she is also the author of the Istanbul City Guide and Istanbul Encounter pocket guide and writes about the city for a host of international magazines and websites.

Brandon Presser

**Ephesus, Bodrum & the South Aegean, Western Anatolia** After earning an art history degree from Harvard University and working at the Louvre, Brandon swapped landscape canvases for the real deal and joined the glamorous ranks of eternal nomadism. Today, Brandon is a full-time travel writer – he’s written 20 Lonely Planet titles, from Iceland to Thailand and many ‘lands’ in between. For this assignment Brandon travelled from the cold and clear Aegean seas to the dusty backroads of Anatolia; his Turkish adventure will forever remain a cherished memory.

Tom Spurling

**Ankara & Central Anatolia, Cappadocia** Tom Spurling first travelled to Turkey in 2003 to spend the low season in Olympos while waiting for the high season in Olympos. For the previous edition of Turkey, he researched the Mediterranean with his pregnant wife and her all-day sickness. For this edition they returned with baby Oliver who was particularly inspired by the Hittite ruins of central Anatolia. When not travelling Tom lives in Melbourne and teaches high school boys to make the most of their holiday time.

Will Gourlay

**History, The Arts, Architecture, The People** A serial visitor to Turkey, Will first arrived in Istanbul almost 20 years ago. His first lengthy foray took him through Southeast Anatolia and into Syria. He returned soon after to teach for a year in Izmir, where he learned the delights of Iskender kebab and the perils of rakı. Recent trips have been with his wife and children, all of whom are becoming as obsessed with Turkey as he is. Will is now undertaking doctoral research into Turkish culture and society.