



Southeastern Anatolia

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Best Places to Stay

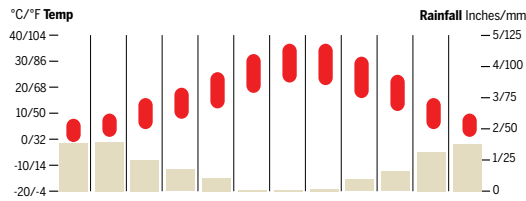
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Why Go?

Southeastern Anatolia is a unique part of Turkey, and apart from small Arabic and Christian pockets, this expansive region is predominantly Kurdish and extremely welcoming to visitors. Choose from a menu of historical cities, including Mardin, on a hill dominating Mesopotamia; Şanlıurfa, swathed in historical mystique and featuring the incredible temple of Göbekli Tepe; the old city of Diyarbakır, ensnared in mighty basalt walls; and the endangered honey-coloured riverside town of Hasankeyf. Move on to Nemrut Dağı (Mt Nemrut), topped with colossal ancient statues, or shimmering Lake Van, edged with snowcapped mountains. Wonderfully isolated spots include Darend and the perfect hilltop village of Savur, while Gaziantep is a must-visit destination for its astounding mosaics and superb local food. A few places could be off limits to foreigners when you visit – mainly near the borders with Iraq and Syria – but most of southeastern Anatolia is safe and accessible to independent travellers.

When to Go

Gaziantep



Mar Visit Diyarbakır and celebrate the Kurdish New Year of Nevruz.

May & Sep Temperatures in southeastern Anatolia are less extreme.

Jun Visit the International Kahta Komma-gene Festival near Nemrut Dağı.

Gaziantep (Antep)

0342 / POP 1.54 MILLION

There's one Turkish word you should learn before visiting Gaziantep: *fıstık* (pistachio). This fast-paced and epicurean city has around 180 pastry shops producing the world's best pistachio baklava. Other culinary treats are also on offer for adventurous foodie travellers.

With the biggest city park this side of the Euphrates and a buzzing cafe culture, Gaziantep oozes panache and self-confidence. It also has one astounding attraction definitely worth travelling across Turkey for: the superb Gaziantep Zeugma Mosaic Museum.

The older parts of the city are being reinvigorated, and the fortress, bazaars, caravanserais and old stone houses have been lovingly restored.

History

By the time the Arabs conquered the town in 638, the Persians, Alexander the Great, the Romans and the Byzantines had all left their imprints on Aintab (as Gaziantep was formerly known). The region remained politically unstable until the Seljuk Turks arrived from the east around 1070.

Aintab remained a city of Seljuk culture, ruled by petty Turkish lords, until the coming of the Ottomans under Selim the Grim in 1516.

During the Ottoman period, Aintab had a sizeable Christian population, including a large proportion of Armenians. Armenian churches and mansions punctuate the city's historical core.

In 1920, as the victorious Allies sought to carve up the Ottoman territories, Aintab was besieged by French forces intent on adding Turkish lands to their holdings in Syria and Lebanon. Aintab's fierce nationalist defenders finally surrendered on 8 February 1921. The epithet 'Gazi' (War Hero) was added to Antep in 1973, commemorating their tenacious defence.

With its proximity to Syria, Gaziantep has recently become a haven for refugees fleeing the conflict across the border, and the area around İnönü Caddesi's western end has developed as a 'Little Aleppo'. In August 2014, it was estimated that around 10% of Gaziantep's total population were Syrian refugees, and this influx has had a major impact on housing and employment in the city.

Sights & Activities

The tourist office (p577) has the *Gaziantep Tarih ve Kültür Yolu* (Gaziantep History & Culture Road) brochure detailing 40 sights. Gaziantep is also promoting itself as a 'museum city'; recent openings include a war museum and an Atatürk museum. Ask at the tourist office.

★ Gaziantep Zeugma Mosaic Museum

MUSEUM

(www.gaziantepmuzesi.gov.tr; Şehitkamil Caddesi; admission ₺10; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) This modern museum showcases superb mosaics unearthed at the Roman site of Belkis-Zeugma before the Birecik Dam flooded most of the site forever. The 2nd floor has excellent views of virtually complete floor mosaics retrieved from Roman villas, providing a detailed insight into past centuries. Other incredibly well-preserved highlights include the poignant *Gypsy Girl* and the *Birth of Venus* mosaics, and modern interactive technology also brings history to life in a compelling way.

To find the museum, follow the underpass on the left of the train station, continue under the busy main highway, turn right, and then continue on for another 400m. A taxi from central Gaziantep should be around ₺10.

★ Kale

FORTRESS

(Citadel; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) **FREE** Thought to have been constructed by the Romans, the citadel was restored by Emperor Justinian in the 6th century AD, and rebuilt extensively by the Seljuks in the 12th and 13th centuries. The interior of the castle contains the **Gaziantep Defence and Heroism Panoramic Museum** (admission ₺1; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm), a tribute to the fighters who bravely defended the city against the French in 1920.

Gaziantep Museum

MUSEUM

(İstasyon Caddesi; admission ₺3; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun) This museum previously housed the city's astounding collection of mosaics. Following their relocation to the Gaziantep Zeugma Mosaic Museum, this location now focuses on ancient seals, and Hittite carvings and sculpture.

★ Bakircilar Çarşısı

MARKET

Gaziantep's labyrinthine bazaar includes the **Zincirli Bedesten** (Coppersmiths' Market), now restored and full of metalworkers and shoemakers. Excellent food markets include