

# Understand Turkey

## **TURKEY TODAY..... 618**

Despite being part of a troubled neighbourhood, Turkey has enjoyed a decade of economic growth, yet its political scene remains volatile.

## **HISTORY .....620**

Follow humankind's odyssey from ancient Anatolia to post-Atatürk Turkey, an epic saga stretching across millennia.

## **ARCHITECTURE .....634**

From Roman theatres to Ottoman palaces, Turkey's architecture offers travellers a chance to see history in a tangible form.

## **THE TURKISH TABLE.....638**

There's more to dining out in Turkey than ubiquitous kebaps – say *afiyet olsun* (bon appétit) and discover the diverse delights of Turkish cuisine.

## **ARTS..... 641**

Turkish culture is livelier than an İstanbul nightclub – a heady mix of carpets, Orhan Pamuk and BaBa ZuLa's belly-dancing dub.

## **PEOPLE .....645**

Turkey is inhabited by Turks, right? Yes, but there's also Kurds, Laz, Hemşin, Yörük, Jews, Greeks, Armenians, Circassians, Abkhazians...

## **ENVIRONMENT .....649**

The country that links Europe with Asia has some major assets, but it also faces challenges, including earthquakes, hasty development and Bosphorus tanker traffic.

# Turkey Today

A loyal Western ally in a troubled neighbourhood, Turkey remains pivotal on the world stage. After more than a decade of strong economic growth, Turks have seen their standard of living rise significantly, but long-standing political tensions remain as the processes of modernisation and democratisation continue.

## Best in Print

### **Birds Without Wings**

(Louis de Bernières)

### **Turkish Awakening** (Alev Scott)

### **The Assassin from Apricot City**

(Witold Szablowski)

### **Portrait of a Turkish Family**

(Irfan Orga)

### **The Museum of Innocence**

(Orhan Pamuk)

### **Meander: East to West along a**

### **Turkish River** (Jeremy Seal)

### **Turkish Coast: Through Writers' Eyes**

(Rupert Scott)

### **The Winter Thief** (Jenny White)

## Best on Film

**Vizontele** Quirky comedy about the first family to get a TV in a small town.

**Winter Sleep** Poignant character study in snowy Anatolia.

**Çoğunluk (Majority)** Travails of love between a rebellious youth and a Kurdish girl.

**Once Upon a Time in Anatolia** Night-time rambles on the steppe in search of a corpse.

**Babam ve Oğlum** Portrays the generation gap in an Aegean village.

**Hamam** Turkish expat inherits a hamam; addresses gay issues.

**Cosmos** A mysterious stranger appears in a remote border town.

## Political Progress?

The Turks may be a laid-back people but their political scene is certainly feisty, particularly so in recent years. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) headed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been in power since 2002 and has overseen an extended period of economic growth. The standard of living and infrastructure across the country have improved markedly, but critics allege the government is increasingly authoritarian. Some allege it has a secret Islamist agenda, citing recent restrictions on alcohol sales and advertising as evidence.

Criticism of the AKP came to a head during the Gezi Park protests of 2013, when plans for a shopping-mall project in an Istanbul park catalysed various groups that disapproved of Erdoğan's governing style. He promptly dismissed protesters as *çapulcular* (looters), but they appropriated his insult, claiming that 'chapulling' meant 'fighting for your rights'. Protests spread and continued for several weeks, with up to eight civilians, and two policemen, killed.

In December 2013 allegations of extensive corruption were levelled at senior members of the AKP. Several ministers were dismissed and Erdoğan's own son was accused. This triggered the government's fierce denunciation of the Gulen educational movement, which it accused of concocting the allegations. Many predicted that the AKP would suffer a loss in popularity, but in the municipal elections of early 2014, after fierce campaigning, the AKP emerged as victors. This clearly demonstrated that despite having many vocal detractors its message still resonates with many Turks. Tensions increased again in early 2014 after the Soma mining disaster, where 301 miners died, with many criticising Erdoğan's response. Erdoğan then campaigned frantically for the first direct presidential elections in Turkey's history. He won in the first round, ensuring a five-year stay in the presidential palace.