



PETEN TRAVELS

TRAVEL BEYOND THE ORDINARY

## GOING WITH THE FLOW OF THE ANCIENT RIVERS TRACING THE EARLY MESOPOTAMIAN CIVILIZATIONS

Private tours of the most important archaeological projects

Friday, August 28th - Friday, September 11th  
(14 Nights, 15 Days)



**A journey filled with history, nature, and the legend of the rushing waters of the Orontes, Euphrates and the Tigris's quieter flow...**

**Antioch, Zeugma, Göbekli Tepe, Tur Abdin and the colourful, authentic bazaars of the Southeast of Turkey.**

Antioch, city of the artistic and faithful. Zeugma, the world's largest mosaic museum, surpasses even the Bardo of Tunis and the Antakya Museum in the ancient city of Antioch.

A great mystery lies behind Göbeklitepe. What makes it unique is not the size or beauty of the monuments, but the date when they were built, roughly twelve thousand years ago!

The bustling and colourful markets are where one experiences the heart and soul of the Southeast cities which lie between the Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean. The trade routes from the east, west and north that pass that intersect these cities have determined the history of the region's civilization and its cultural development.

## Day 1 Istanbul

### Special category hotel

Guests are met by a Peten Travels tour manager at the Atatürk Airport and then transferred to their hotel. That evening will be spent meeting your fellow travellers along with your guides while enjoying a drink and sit down dinner. **(D)**

## Day 2 Fly to Antioch

### Savon Hotel (special category)

Travelling distance: 30 km~19 miles

After breakfast we take the morning flight to Antioch (Antakya) where we will spend three nights. Antioch was much more than just a great city of the Hellenic culture, for it was here that their pagan Roman masters first called early followers of Jesus Christ “Christians”. Contemplating the history of Antioch we drive up to the **Castle** for the panoramic view. Visit the **Church of St. Peter** where St. Peter held the first early masses and where, amazingly enough, masses are still held today. Nearby you will see the rock-relief of **Charon the Boatman of Hell** Look out for laurel soap, oil, silk weaving and stone masonry, are all of which made locally. **(B, L, D)**

## Day 3 Antioch

### Savon Hotel

Travelling distance: 125 km~78 miles

#### Agatha Christie in Antioch

An excellent impression of these cities’ past glories may be obtained from the wonderful collection of late Roman and Byzantine mosaics in the **Archaeological Museum**, which is rivaled only to the Bardo Museum in Tunis. The mosaics, fastidiously removed from the Roman villas in the Harbiye neighborhood, date mainly from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. They represent the most extensive and impressive collection of art from the Middle East, and quite possibly the world.

This afternoon we explore two important sites on the Amuq Valley near the Syrian border: **Tell Atçana (Alalakh)** and **Tell Tayinat**. The Amuq—the classical “plain of Antioch”—is a broad, fertile valley situated near the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea. The lower Orontes River, whose floodwaters have deposited a thick layer of alluvium, flows through this valley. It is bordered on the south and east by the Syrian Arab Republic. **(B, L, D)**

## Day 4 Antioch

### Savon Hotel

Travelling distance: 120 km~ 75 miles

#### Boat trip on the Eastern Mediterranean

We drive south to the **Monastery of St. Simeon** the Stylite, to pay our respects to the “Man of the Wonderful Mountain” before continuing towards the Syrian border to the ancient city of **Seleuceia in Pieria**, modern Çevlik. We stop at the village of **Vakıflı**, the only Armenian village in Turkey. The Church of the Virgin Mary is built by its residents in 1895, and it is still open for services. Continue to the **Dor Temple** located on a spot overlooking Çevlik (Seleuceia in Pieria). Here we will also see one of the area’s most impressive feats of engineering, the **huge**

**underground channel (the Titus Tunnel)** along with the **rock tombs and cradle cave**. The channel was gouged from living rock during the reign of the Roman Emperor Vespasian in the first century in order to divert mountain streams from silting up the port. There are caves carved into limestone rocks in close proximity to the Titus Tunnel Known as the Kings' Tomb. Our lunch will be at a sea-food restaurant before boarding the privately chartered boat at the port of Seleuceia in Pieria to explore the coves and caves along **Mt.Casius** (Keldagi). **(B, L, D)**

## **Day 5 Gaziantep**

### **Belkis Han or Anadolu Evleri**

**Travelling distance: 256 km~160 miles**

Following our breakfast we set off on our drive through the Amik plain and the Nur Mountains towards the **Yesemek Open-Air Museum**. Here we find a vast quarry with 300 Hittite stones and statues in various states of completion lying in the fields. We continue to the **Tilmen Höyük**, a forgotten capital city dating back to the Late Chalcolithic Age (3400-3000 B.C). After a short drive we are at the site of **Zincirli Höyük** where buried are extensive ruins of the ancient walled city of Sam'al, nestled in a fertile valley surrounded by heavily forested mountains. A number of significant finds have already been unearthed. An inscribed pictorial stele commemorating a royal official, "Kuttamuwa, servant of (King) Panamuwa," was found by the Neubauer Expedition in a newly opened excavation area in the lower town. This important discovery, which reveals new aspects of ancient religious belief and practice, was reported in the New York Times and in Archaeology magazine, which named it one of the "top ten" archaeological discoveries of 2008. Late afternoon we enjoy the Colors of Gaziantep in the **Gaziantep Market**; one of the most vibrant in Anatolia with every tone of red, yellow and green in evidence. Fiery spices, gleaming copper, blue, red and purple 'kutnu' fabrics and blood red 'yemeni' slippers. And add to all these the gaily painted doors of traditional Antep houses, walls painted with pictures, and courtyards turned into living spaces. On market days the streets suddenly burst into a rainbow of color **(B, L, D)**

## **Day 6 Gaziantep**

### **Belkis Han or Anadolu Evleri**

#### **Gastronomy and History**

**Our day will be with the local food specialist**

Two thousand years after sinking into oblivion, the ancient city of Zeugma was suddenly jolted awake. Once one of the world's largest cities, Zeugma, albeit smaller now, is alive and well once again, this time under the roof of **the Zeugma Mosaic and Archaeology Museum**- Like fine embroidery these amazing mosaics have a story to tell. In one you find yourself in the middle of the Trojan War, in another enthralled by the Gypsy Girl's piercing eyes. Newly opened Zeugma Mosaic Museum will become the world's largest mosaic museum due to its diverse collection. The city is known for its cuisine and food culture, so it is inevitable to visit the **Cuisine Museum**. We end the day at the **Gaziantep Castle**. **(B, L, D)**

## **Day 7 Şanlıurfa (Edessa of Osrhoene-Urhoy)**

### **Manici Edessa Hotel (special category)**

**Travelling distance 150 km ~ 94 miles**

This morning we drive to the Belkis Tepe, a hill that provides a majestic view over the site of **Zeugma**. Zeugma was founded by the Macedonian Seleucid ruler Nicator I and this Hellenistic city grew in prosperity during Roman times thanks to its location on the trade road stretching eastwards across Asia to China. Zeugma's huge wealth was reflected in the homes of its

inhabitants. Rich merchants and Roman noblemen and officers vied with one another to adorn their houses with the world's loveliest mosaics, ceramics, statues, and frescos. Zeugma has been described in international literature as the 'second Pompeii'

**Carchemish**, an untouched ancient city located near the western shore of the Euphrates River, is one of the most important settlement areas of Near Eastern archaeology. It is located on an important intersection of roads that linked Anatolia to Mesopotamia and to Egypt. The few excavations carried out in the area have revealed that the city had been inhabited since the Neolithic period. The epic of Gilgamesh was portrayed on reliefs in Carchemish from the Hittite period. Reliefs uncovered from the site are currently on display at the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara. The site is in the military zone, it is an active excavation site. **(B, L, D)**

## Day 8 Şanlıurfa

### Manici Edessa Hotel (special category)

This morning we visit the **Urfa Museum** to see the world's oldest statue ever to be discovered until now. It was named the **Balıkligöl Statue** and represents 'the God of Eroticism' or 'the God of Reproduction', which was in a Neolithic temple. And then we have a short drive to **Göbekli Tepe**. It is famous for containing the world's oldest known temples (dated before 9000 BC) along with its discovery contradicting the long-held belief that the introduction of agriculture preceded the construction of large buildings. Göbekli Tepe was created by hunter-gatherers, yet is assumed to be a key location for understanding the origins of agriculture.

We stop at **Haleplibahçe** for its newly unearthed, breathtaking mosaics. They were discovered by chance when struck by a bulldozer during an urban infrastructure project. Subsequently rescued in an excavation by the museum, they are now among the finest examples of mosaics in the Eastern world. **(B, L, D)**

## Day 9 Şanlıurfa

### Manici Edessa Hotel

**Travelling distance: 146 km ~92 miles**

#### The Abraham Path

This morning we drive in the direction of Akçakale to view **Sultantepe höyük** (mound). During the 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C, it was a substantial Assyrian settlement where among the remains are a temple dedicated to Sin, the moon god of Harran. Tablets written in Assyrian and Sumerian covering many subjects including magic, mathematics, medicine, astrology, and prayers are to be viewed. Some tell the story of the Creation and the Flood, while others tell the story of the Poor Man of Nippur and the adventures of the hero Gilgamesh.

We continue on to the village of **Harran** (one of the oldest continuously inhabited spots on earth), with its beehive-like dwellings, the design of which goes back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and are unique to Turkey and Syria. In addition to these beehive houses, there are the ruined walls, the Ulu Cami and the crumbling fortress that all add up to give the place a feeling of deep antiquity. The remains of the fortress (Kale) date back to around 1059 when the Fatimids restored the original buildings. It is thought that a castle was already standing here from Hittite times.

Harran is a pivotal point in the history of the Hebrew people, where Biblical and archaeological materials converge. It was in Harran that Rebecca drew water for Jacob and from where Abraham decided to make his move into the land of Canaan.

The **Bible** (*Genesis 11:31, 11:32, 12:4*) names Harran or Haran as the place where Terah and his son **Abram (Abraham, Ibrahim)** and his grandson Lot stayed when they fled from Ur of the Chaldees. Abraham's father Terah died in Haran (*Genesis 12:4*). **Haran** rebelled against its Assyrian rulers and this too is mentioned in the Bible (*2 Kings 19:12, Isaiah 37:12*).

Later, in Roman times Harran was known as **Carrhae**, and was the place of the famous **Battle of Carrhae** in which the Roman Emperor Crassus was defeated by the Parthians. In early Islamic times Harran was one of the major cities of the region and was a center for translating works of astronomy, philosophy, natural sciences, and medicine from Greek into Syriac and then into Arabic.

We continue our journey 26 km east from **Harran** where there are the ruins of the **Han El Ba'rur**, a Seljuk caravanserai that dates back to 1128. Another 12 km northeast of Han El Ba'rur are the ruins of **Şuayb**, an ancient, partially subterranean, town where once the **Prophet Jethro** lived. From Şuayb it is 18km north to reach the site of the ancient **Soğmatar** (also called **Sumatar**), a **Sabian** (the Sabians are Arameans) place of worship of the Moon God.

**The Urfa market** with its myriad of sounds, colors and smells immediately draw us in, taking us on a journey deep into the past. **(B, L, D)**

## **Day 10 Mardin**

### **Reyhani Kasrı or similar special category hotel**

**Travelling distance: 188 km~118 miles**

We continue to Mardin, home and meeting place of Turkish, Arabic and Kurdish cultures, as well as two religions, Islam and Christianity. The stone houses, reflecting architectural styles closer to Iraq and Syria, are scattered seemingly at random across the steep, rocky side of the escarpment. Mardin is the center of an important community of Syrian Orthodox Christians, the so-called Jacobites.

We visit the Syrian Orthodox monastery of **Deir-al-Zafaran** ('Saffron Monastery'). For many years this monastery was the official residence of the Patriarch of Antioch, the head of the Syrian Orthodox Church (He now lives in Damascus). Continue on to the largest ancient structure, **Sultan Kasım Medrese**, names after an Akkoyunlu ruler who reigned 1469 to 1503.

We visit **The Great Mosque**, on one side the Vaulted Market, on the other the Coppersmiths' Bazaar. The greatest joy of Mardin is exploring the unpredictable lanes of the Old City. A large number of fortress-like houses, capable of accommodating an extended family of 40 or 50 around an interior court, can be found in several clusters. The Bazaar area is full of oriental colors, noises, and exotic pungent smells. Dinner is at a local restaurant. **(B, L, D)**

## **Day 11 Mardin**

### **Reyhani Kasrı or similar special category hotel**

#### **The Children of Mardin- Mesopotamia's Eyes**

The splendor of old times is preserved in this haunting city, whose streets wind around the high walls of chateau-like houses. And the owners of those streets are the children. Listen closely as they whisper a fairy tale of the East. Mardin perches on a bluff above the flat lands of Mesopotamia. Mardin is the city of the Artukids, traces of whom you will encounter almost everywhere. The minaret of the Great Mosque, one of Mardin's most prominent symbols, represents the pinnacle of stone workmanship. **The Şehidiye Mosque** with its delicate minaret,

the smaller **Şeyh Çabuk Mesjid**, and the **Hatuniye Madrasa** are the Artukids' other gifts to the city. Take a break on the terrace of Şehidiye Mosque to watch Mardin's famous tumbler pigeons.

We visit the Church of the **Forty Martyrs**, one of the earliest churches dedicated to the martyrs. A short drive to the renowned Turkish fashion designer **Cemil İpekçi**'s school and atelier founded last year allows us to learn about a social responsibility project to offer much needed job opportunities and scholarships to local women. We end our day at the **Mardin Archaeology Museum**. (B, L, D)

## Day 12 Midyat

### **Kasr-ı Nehroz (special category, luxury boutique hotel)**

**Travelling distance: 100 km~ 63 miles**

#### **Journey into the heart of Tur Abidin (Mountain of the Servant of God)**

This morning we travel to the town of **Dara Anastasioupolis**. It is known as the second most important border city, after the Southeastern metropolis of Nisibis (modern Nusaybin). The Silk Road, that artery of international trade, ran through it. This capital of the transit trade was at one time even the seat of a bishopric until its importance waned following a period of incessant raids.

We continue to Midyat, the heart of the Tur Abidin. After checking into our luxury hotel we prepare for our journey to **Hah** and **Ivardo / Ayn Vert**, the "village of cathedrals" where we visit the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We shall end the day at the **Mor Gabriel Monastery** with a meeting with the monks and priests. (B, L, D)

## Day 13 Diyarbakır

### **Dedeman Hotel (5-star)**

**Travelling distance: 190 km~ 119 miles**

Today we travel to **Hasankeyf**. The descent from the high plateau of the Tur Abidin to the valley of the Tigris is quite spectacular. It was here in Hasankeyf, a point where the river passes through a narrow defile, that the Romans built a stronghold and then the Byzantines a bishopric. Hence it has always ranked as an important outpost on the troubled frontier with Persia. It is closed to the visitors; we only view its exterior, which is still impressive. We visit the fine 15<sup>th</sup> century **Zeynel Bey Türbesi**, the cylinder-shaped tomb of an Ayyubid king.

Continuing to the north along the tributaries of the Tigris we stop at the **Malabadi Köprüsü**, a bridge, built by the Artukids in 1146 AD. The beauty of its design and its situation will lift the heart of any traveller. Continue to **Ziyaret Tepe**, the ancient city of **Tushhan**. Continuously occupied for 2,400 years beginning in the Early Bronze Age, it was an important urban center on the edge of the Assyrian Empire. It is then onto the walled city of Diyarbakır, in ancient Amida. The city is located on the basin of the River Tigris and its massive black basalt walls are second only to the Great Wall of China in length, breadth and height.

(B, L, D)

## Day 14 Diyarbakır

### **Dedeman Hotel**

**Travelling distance: 130km~82 miles**

This morning we first visit the 11th century **Ulu Cami** which ranks both as one of the oldest mosques in Anatolia and one of the holiest places of Islam. Then we find the hidden, small **Keldani Church**, where Chaldaen Christians of the Syrian rite, who are in communion with the



Roman Catholic Church, worship. Then we stop at the **Dört Ayaklı Minaret** ('Four-Legged Minaret') and **Meryem Ana Kilisesi**, the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is a part of a large monastic foundation. It has been dated variously to the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Syrian Orthodox services are conducted in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus. The altar in the church dates from the Byzantine period which also reveals several interesting icons. We drive along the **city ancient walls** and stop at the main gates to view the fertile plain of the Tigris. We visit the **Surp Giragos Church**, the largest Armenian Church in the Middle East and one of the most important works of Armenian architecture. Continuing to **Çayönü**, we learn of how very important this prehistoric settlement was in establishing the beginnings of village-farming in south eastern Turkey. The Çayönü excavations are being carried out by the University of Chicago and Istanbul University. Our Farewell dinner at a special restaurant (**B, L, D**)

## Day 15 Fly back home

We take the morning flight to İstanbul so that guests can connect to their return flights home.

**PLEASE NOTE** - the itinerary on this trip involves a good deal of walking and rough drives into the wild, allowing us to witness breathtaking natural scenery while visiting the unique historical wonders of Turkey. Good comfortable footwear is therefore essential. It should be pointed out that the tour might not be suitable for passengers who require assistance or who have difficulties with mobility. To fully enjoy this trip, please make sure you enjoy hiking, good local food, photography, cultural interaction and serendipity. Don't forget to bring your bathing- suit!

### Trip limited to a maximum of 10 participants

#### Tour price

**€6150 Euro** per person based on double occupancy (twin /double bedded room)

**€510 Euro** single room supplement

### What's included this price?

- Professional local guide & art historians and archaeologists from local universities or museum directors.
- Best available hotels (mostly the Deluxe rooms) and meals as indicated in the itinerary (Special restaurants famous for their traditional regional cuisine) (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- Domestic flights from İstanbul to Antakya and Diyarbakır to İstanbul & airport taxes
- Bottled mineral water during transportation
- All ground transportation by a/c, modern mini / midi bus with fridge, reclining seats, wide windows.
- All entrance fees & donations, parking fares, local taxes
- Meticulously prepared tour folder with maps and information to help participants get the most from the tour
- Gratuities to hotel staff , restaurant and driver, baggage handling
- Donations for the archaeological projects.

### What's not included?

- International outbound & return air travel fare
- Insurance of any kind
- Discretionary gratuities to your special guide and driver
- Excess baggage fees, cost of obtaining passport and visa
- Personal expenses such as beverages, laundry, room service, communication charges.

**AN ISTANBUL EXTENSION TOUR TO PRECEDE THIS TOUR IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.**