



PETEN TRAVELS

TRAVEL BEYOND THE ORDINARY

Eastern Turkey-Lake Van Wild flowers, Orchids and Castles

(9 nights, 10 days)



Situated at 1700m (5,600ft), Lake Van is a high altitude lake in eastern Anatolia. The shoreline itself measures 430km (230 miles) making it the largest lake in Turkey. The southern side is where most of our excursions take place. It offers varied habitats, volcanic craters, sub-alpine grass steppes, subalpine mountain and alpine regions each with their own special biotopes and flowers.

Breathtaking snow-capped mountains surround the lake with high altitude passes to take us up to the snow line to find the earliest spring flowers. Lower down these sometimes barren lands offers amazing flowers, fritillaries, tulips, dwarf irises, orchids, primulas, and the ubiquitous pea family in all shapes and forms.

Lake Van lies at the heart of the ancient Kingdom of Urartu and it is impossible to escape history here. Herds of sheep and goats being milked in the high pastures, tented villages, shepherds riding donkeys all conjure up Biblical scenes; a reminder that this is Old Testament country. Ancient castles and religious sites are all woven into this well-rounded tour and there are intriguing questions to answer along the way. Does the Urartian hilltop stronghold of Cavustepe really look down on the original Garden of Eden?

Day 1 Istanbul

Special category hotel

Your arrival in Istanbul starts this adventure. Participants are met upon arrival and transferred to the hotel. During the evening we will enjoy a welcome reception and introductory briefing in a private room at our hotel, followed by a relaxing dinner. **(D)**

Day 2 Fly to Van

World Elite or Rescate (5-star)

A midday flight takes us to Van and to our hotel for the next 7 nights. After checking into our rooms with the lake view we are ready to set off on our first exciting excursion to **Akdamar Island** to see the restored beautiful Armenian Church. A picnic basket with fresh local bread, cheeses and fresh fruit, with the mythological Buzbağ wine from the time of the Urartians, will travel with us on the boat. **(B, Picnic basket, D)**

Day 3 Van

World Elite or Rescate

Our first full day will be searching for flowers in the meadows and woodlands on the south side of the lake, before circling back to Van inland through Gürpınar. There are a good number of orchids inhabiting this area including *Dactylorhiza umbrosa* and *Orchis pseudolaxiflora* which are both widespread in wet meadows. The spectacular and rare *Comperia compariana* is around too but it is mostly too early to see it in full flower. Expect colourful meadow flowers in abundance. **(B, L, D)**

Day 4 Van

World Elite or Rescate

Today we set out eastward to visit the spectacular waterfalls at **Muradiye**. An Armenian monastery lies just off the route providing for a worthwhile excursion. Upon our return we will visit Amik Castle on the lake shore.

Along the way we hope to see a number of dwarf irises including the *Iris barnumae*. *Gladiolus kotschyanus* grows around the waterfalls as does *Iris iberica*. No doubt orchids will be spotted along the route and there will be a full cast of supporting flora with centaureas, cyanoglossums through to vicias. **(B, L, D)**

Day 5 Van

World Elite or Rescate

For a total change of habitat, we are off up the **Çatak Road** to reach some higher elevations and explore some of the dry steppe which can be full of interesting flowers. Some of the gorges, gulleys and damper areas provide different habitats increasing the variety in the flora. Tulips should be amongst the day's finds including the *Tulipa armena*, *T. sintenisii* and *I. paradox*. *Orchis coriophora* is often found in this habitat and we can expect to see some campanula on this excursion, possibly *Campanula reuterana*, *C. flaccidula* and the diminutive *C. karakuschensis* **(B, L, D)**

Day 6 Van

World Elite or Rescate

This is another day for seeking higher ground as we head up the **Güzeldere Pass**. Without too much deviation we can take in **Çavuştepe** castle, one of the best known Urartian fortresses and further on we will stop at the formidable **Hosap castle**. The top of the pass is around 2,700m (8, 860ft) and if there is still snow around we can hope to find *Gentiana verna*, *Primula auricula* and *P. algida*. On

the way we might find yet more tulips, *T. biflora*, *T. humilis*, and *T. syvestris* and possibly another Iris, *I. pseudocaucasia*. There will be gageas and muscari in variety which always prove challenging in their identification. (B, L, D)

Day 7 Van World Elite or Rescate

The old **Nemrut volcanic crater** at the western end of Lake Van is now a lake. This is our target for today travelling through Tatvan to reach it. There is more interesting flora in this area including fritillaries and orchids. *Orchis pinetorum* grows inside the crater as does *Dactylorhiza flavescens*. Also here we can look for *Fritillaria minuta* and *F. assyriaca*. There will also be plenty of the more common species around. The adonis is well represented in the region with at least four different species. The beautiful *Consolida orientalis* at its peak can paint whole fields blue sometimes rivalling the fields of red poppies. (B, L, D)

Day 8 Van World Elite or Rescate

It is back to high ground again today to find alpine conditions on the **Karabet pass** which is located just south of Lake Van. If we have missed *Iris sari* so far we might see it today. It is one of 11 species known to grow in the Lake Van basin along with *Tulipa armena*, one of 8 species, and *Fritillaria crassifolia*, one of 16 species. It could be a day for seeking out saxifrages too with *Saxifraga kotschii* recorded here. (B, L, D)

Day 9 Fly to Istanbul Special category hotel

This morning we explore the **old city of Van** before we drive back to the airport for our mid afternoon flight back to Istanbul. Check into our hotel at the heart of the old city of Istanbul. Enjoy a festive farewell dinner tonight at an exclusive restaurant. (B, L, D)

Day 10 Fly back home

After breakfast, participants are transferred to the International Atatürk airport to make their return flights. (B)

Trip limited to a maximum of 10 participants.

Tour price

€3450 Euro per person on double occupancy

€355 Euro single room supplement

What is included in this price?

- Specialists leadership and local tour guide
- Accommodation and meals as indicated in the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- Boat trip
- All ground transportation by a/c, modern mini / midi bus with fridge, reclining seats, wide windows.
- Individual arrival and departure airport transfers
- Meticulously prepared tour folder with maps and information to help participant get the most from the tour

- Domestic flights fare from Istanbul to Van and Van to Istanbul
- Parking fares, local taxes
- Gratuities to hotel& restaurant, driver, guide and baggage handling
- Entrance fees to all sites

What's not included?

- International return air travel
- Insurance of any kind
- Excess baggage charges, airport taxes, passport or visa fees.
- Personal expenses such as beverages, laundry, room service, communication charges...
- Discretionary gratuities to your guide and driver.

Because of the unpredictable nature of the weather and the flower season, the itinerary for this holiday will be flexible to allow us to react to local conditions. We will however make time to visit all the major habitats in the locality. Lunch will be a mixture of village houses, picnic lunches and small town restaurants again, depending on weather conditions. Many of the excursions will involve walking, often uphill, so a walking fitness of 6/7 miles daily is recommended.

Peten Travels reserves the right to change hotel accommodations if required. Please note that any changes are usually UPGRADES and are also at NO additional cost. Also domestic flight is subject to change.

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