

There are cities, and then there is Istanbul.

We start in Istanbul on the banks of the Bosphorus. Some things have to be seen: a walk around the old district of Sultanahmet, the landmark Hagia Sofia, the Blue Mosque and the Topkapi Palace. Some of the best times just have to be experienced: lunch in the Topkapi Palace overlooking the Bosphorus, talking about the Harem and the gem collection; coffee and pastries in a traditional coffeehouse; searching for saffron in the Spice Bazaar; shopping and haggling in the Grand Bazaar. Late afternoon is a wonderful time to enjoy a private boat ride along the Bosphorus from where you will be able to see Istanbul's historic buildings from the water.

Cappadocia is a world away from the high energy of Istanbul. You can think that you are on another planet when you visit the unreal moon landscape of Göreme, with its Rock Chapels carved by the early Christians and decorated with frescoes dating from the sixth to the tenth century. There is yet another world down below in the Kaymakli Underground City. Different civilizations lie side by side when you visit the Byzantine Monastic Complex of Zelve and then the Troglodyte Village of Avcilar. You can take lunch in the Pigeon Valley, and afterwards tour the dramatic Uchisar Castle, or drive to the village of Avanos, famous for its pottery.

A high spot of your visit will be a magical balloon ride over the fairy-tale chimneys of Cappadocia. Back on the ground we think that the Soganli village is one of the most interesting parts of the region. The everyday life of a traditional small Cappadocian village is preserved here, with its churches and closed community. In Ortahisar, one of the highest points of the area, you will get a full view of this spectacular volcanic region.

WE SUGGEST:

Three nights Istanbul, two nights Cappadocia. A private visit to the archeological **restoration of the 12th Century monastery** of Christ Pantocrator in Istanbul with the chief restorer. An early morning **hot-air balloon** ride over the fairytale chimneys of Cappadocia.