

Destination Profile: Turkey

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Spanning History and Geography

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Turkey is a popular and multicultural holiday and expatriate destination. Its vibrant cities, varied landscapes, and unique historical sites offer a wealth of enriching experiences that will reward the adventurous expatriate. With a unique location straddling Europe and Asia, and a rich and diverse history representing the cradle of many civilizations, Turkey is a fascinating place to live, welcoming expatriates and their families from all over the world.

Turkey is bordered by eight countries. The Bosphorus separates the European and Asian sides of the country. Ankara is the modern capital of Turkey, and Istanbul is the ancient one. Turkey is a democratic and secular constitutional republic. The predominant religion is Islam.

Having close ties with the West, Turkey is member of NATO and the Council of Europe. It also maintains economic and political relations with Middle Eastern and African countries. The country has developed dramatically in the last 10 years, becoming more of a global center. Turkey is a major regional economic power, and lying between two continents, it also has crucial geostrategic importance.

Tourism in Turkey is an important part of the economy, as more than 28 million people visited the country in 2014. The majority of the visitors are tourists from the U.K., Germany, Russia, Ukraine, and Japan. Tourism is focused largely on beach resorts and historical sites—Ephesus (site of the Temple of Artemis), Troy, Pergamon, Pamukkale, and others. Turkey is home to 10 UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Fusing the modern and the ancient, combining the sound of Muslim muezzins with the sight of Roman Catholic ruins and modern skyscrapers, Istanbul is a unique and extremely vibrant city. While one will not find such extreme contradictions throughout the country, Turkey is full of architectural wonders, stunning landscapes, archaeological sites, beaches, and captivating cities.

Doing Business: Culture and Behavior

Turkish people are generally warm and friendly. Turks prefer to do business with those they know and respect; therefore it is good to spend time establishing a personal relationship. They do not require as much personal space as many other cultures and will stand close to you while conversing. It is vital to maintain eye contact while speaking, since Turks take this as a sign of sincerity.

Discussions start slowly, with many questions that may seem irrelevant to the purpose of your visit. Ask a Turk about his or her family without prying. Questions about children will be welcomed. The Turks are proud of their country and will enjoy answering questions on their culture and history, but be sure to avoid political history.

Most Turkish men love football (soccer) and usually support one of three teams: Galatasaray, Beşiktaş or Fenerbahçe. Asking after their team's recent fortunes will always produce lively and animated responses.

In setting business meetings, appointments are necessary and should be made one or two weeks in advance. July and August should be avoided—this is when Turks take their holiday as well as the time of Ramazan (Ramadan).

Business dress is conservative. A suit and tie is standard attire for men. Women should wear smart professional outfits and are advised to refrain from exposing their legs and arms, and to ensure clothes are not tight-fitting. Business cards are exchanged without formal ritual, using both hands and given to the receptionist on arrival.

Hospitality and looking after guests is very important in Turkish culture. Turkish hospitality dictates that the hosts always pay for the meal. Sharing a bill is not common.

Turkish, the official language, is spoken by 90 percent of the population. Minority languages include Kurdish, Arabic, Circassian, Greek, Armenian, and Judezmo, a Romance language spoken by Jews.

Outside the Office

Cultural activities in Turkey—arts, hobbies, entertainment, or other leisure activities—are limited only by individual interests and capabilities. Major cities offer international movies, plays, concerts, ballets, operas, and other cultural presentations. Local festivals and more traditional forms of leisure activities are also growing in popularity.

Turkey's rich geography and varied terrain make the country ideal for sports, such as mountain climbing, golf, scuba diving, rafting, skiing, and yachting. Turkey has extreme variations in climatic conditions, often within the same region or province. It is possible to go skiing in a mountain resort after sunbathing on a sandy beach, both on the same day.

Turkish cuisine owes its fame to the country's location at the crossroads of the continents. Every region has a cooking style of its own. Major cities also have restaurants offering dishes from around the world.

Work Permits and Residency Visas

Turkey's national immigration policy and the question of who is allowed to enter and/or stay in the country are closely tied to the republic's notion of national identity and citizenship. Although the constitutional concept of citizenship emphasizes territoriality (*ius soli*) rather than descent (*ius sanguinis*), the concept of national identity clearly relies on the perception of one common culture. In other words, Turkey's immigration policy—including regulations on refugees and asylum—is still strongly guided by the concept of national identity and its underlying principle of cultural unity.

Previously, applicants were required to apply for work visas directly to Turkish consulates/embassies in their home countries. Now, applicants should apply through the official government site, konsolosluk.gov.tr. Applicants must upload required documents, which include passport, work visa application form, employment contract or formal job offer, and official documents from the prospective employer. The applicant is given an appointment for an in-person meeting at which he or she must provide original copies of the submitted documentation.

Housing

From city centers to suburban areas, Turkey offers a multitude of housing options. Major metropolitan areas host luxurious complexes with amenities including private security, kindergartens, sports complexes, social facilities, parking lots, and shopping malls. Foreign homebuyers and investors are legally free to purchase property in Turkey. The real estate market is very competitive, and a sea view adds 50 percent to property prices.

Istanbul is an apartment city, and the distinction between city and suburb does not really exist. The city has multiple business districts, and due to serious traffic congestion, it is always recommended to live close to your place of work.

Most expats—especially those with school-age children—prefer to reside on the European side of the city. A good selection of expat-preferred apartments is available, but single-family homes come at a premium price. June, July, and August have the most turnover in the rental housing market.

Most properties are unfurnished. Furniture rental is not common, but available. "White goods"—light fixtures, window coverings, and wardrobes—do not come standard.

Schools

In addition to public schools, many high-quality private and foundation schools are available. International schools are present throughout the country. Schools providing education in European languages such as English, German, French, and Italian are most common, but there are institutions where languages such as Russian, Japanese, and Chinese are taught as well.

International school fees range from US\$12,000 to \$27,000 per year, depending on the child's age. Additional children enrolled in the same school may get a discount.

Schools are often outside the metropolitan area, requiring bus travel, which is not included in school fees. Applications for the September start of the academic year should be submitted around March.

Getting Around

Turkey has a highly developed transportation infrastructure. Istanbul has both a subway and above-ground trams. Public and private buses carry thousands daily.

For coastal towns such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Bursa, ferry services offer many travelers a fast and far-reaching choice. The train is another low-cost and widely used means of transport; the rail network crosses Turkey from east to west.

Air travel is becoming cheaper every year, thanks to the increasing number of domestic carriers. With about 50 airports in all major population centers, one can fly from any city to another in Turkey in less than an hour.

Security

Since the 1920s, women have enjoyed equal status with men in Turkey. However, travelers should be aware of customs associated with the country's history of Sharia, or Islamic law. When visiting mosques, clean, nonrevealing, modest dress is required. Nudity is illegal on beaches. While not illegal, sunbathing topless is not common.

The crime rate in Turkey is lower than in most countries, but incidents do occur. It is always wise to be aware of your surroundings, avoid conspicuous display of wealth, and safeguard your personal possessions. Particularly in major cities, it is advisable to take a commonsense approach to personal safety and avoid large public gatherings, including political demonstrations.

In the cities, many residential complexes and buildings have 24/7 security. Most windows on the lower floors of buildings have bars for extra security.

The threat of terrorism cannot be dismissed, particularly in southeast Turkey and near the Syrian border. Several terrorist groups have a domestic presence in Turkey: PKK (a Kurdish-aligned terrorist group), DHKP/C (Revolutionary People's Liberation Front), Syria-centered ANF (Al Nusra Front), and ISIS (the Islamic State group). There is always a risk that these extremist groups will carry out attacks in Turkey. Expatriates should look to their country's embassy for specific guidance.

Health Care

While social and health security is governed in essence by the state, the quality of health care in Turkey varies greatly from region to region. The Turkish health care system operates with three different types of hospitals: public, university, and private. Public health care is often not of the same standard as health care in America or Western Europe. However, relatively inexpensive private health care is available, and expatriates will have access to good-quality private hospitals, especially in urban centers.

Shipping and Customs

Goods owned and used for at least 12 months can be brought into Turkey without payment of duty or sales tax. Turkey's Ministry of Customs and Trade and its Quarantine and Inspection Service will subject imported household goods to an inspection.

A detailed inventory must include a description of each item in the shipment, including the brand name and serial numbers of electrical items. The shipment may contain no items packed by the owner (PBO). The shipment must arrive no earlier than two months prior to owner's arrival or no later than six months after the owner's last entry into Turkey.

The Economy

With a gross domestic product of US\$799.54 billion, Turkey is the 17th-largest economy in the world. In less than a decade, per capita income in the country has nearly tripled and now exceeds US\$10,500.

Since 2012, economic growth has moderated. Election-related uncertainties, geopolitical developments, and concerns over the government's handling of corruption allegations dampened confidence and weakened private demand. After growing 4.2 percent in 2013, the economy slowed to 2.9 percent growth in 2014. Moreover, Turkey has been vulnerable to changes in investor sentiment and, together with other emerging markets, has experienced significant currency and financial market volatility since mid-2013.

The EU is Turkey's largest economic partner, accounting for around 40 percent of trade. The EU accession process has been a significant anchor for reforms in Turkey, but progress has slowed in recent years. Both sides are making efforts to regain momentum, with a focus on economic cooperation, in particular the modernization of the customs union and energy relations.

Cost of Living

Living costs in Turkey depend on the region but are generally lower than in the rest of Europe. While Istanbul and tourist resorts might be as expensive as cities in the U.K. or U.S., this will depend on the expatriate's lifestyle and on where he or she chooses to live. Essential foodstuffs and fresh products are significantly cheaper than in Western Europe.

Turkey's significance on the world finance stage is on the rise. Istanbul, the financial capital of the country, is now becoming a world finance center. The country's banking industry demonstrated remarkable resilience after the global financial crisis without any government backing, and Turkish banks are now regarded as among the soundest in Europe.

Unexpected Turkey

Istanbul's Grand Bazaar has 64 streets, 4,000 shops, and 25,000 workers.

In 1503, Leonardo da Vinci submitted plans for a bridge across the Bosphorus. It was never built.

Turkey is responsible for 80 percent of the world's hazelnut exports.

The first Christian church ever built was in Antioch, Turkey.

Santa Claus (St. Nicholas) was born in Patara, Turkey.

Most Turks didn't have surnames until 1934.

The Turkish alphabet doesn't include X or Q but has other letters such as the dotless I (i).

Despite its traditional roots, almost no one in Turkey wears a fez nowadays. They were banned in 1925.

Tulips were introduced to Europe by Turkish traders in the 16th century.

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