

The Special Black Sea Tour

Day 1 ANKARA

Arrive in Ankara, welcome meeting at 5pm before visiting the Hamamönü area, a replica Ottoman town for dinner. [Overnight in Ankara] [D]

Day 2 ANKARA TO AMASYA:

Enroute to Amasya we will visit Hattuşaş (Boğazkale), the once capital of the Hittite empire. The Hittite empire was the longest living empire in central - northern Anatolia with its history dating back 2300 years. Our next stop is Yazılıkaya to see carvings of the Hittite gods and goddesses. Overnight in Amasya. [BD]

Day 3 AMASYA TO SIVAS:

After breakfast we explore Amasya. Built on the banks of Yeşilirmak River, the history of Amasya dates back 7500 years. One of the best examples of Pontic Greek rock tombs can be seen here. During the Ottoman times the city was used as a training centre for the crown prince. On to the city of Sivas, a very important centre for the Seljuk Turks around 900 years ago. Their magnificent buildings beautified the city and we will visit the Grand Mosque (Ulu Camii), a hospital and a madrasah: just a few examples of their wonderful architecture. Overnight in Sivas. [BD]

Day 4 SIVAS:

This morning we head south to the town of Kangal. This little town is famous for its giant shepherd dogs called Kangal or Karabaş (Black Head/Nose). We visit a breeding centre and the nearby Dr Fish pool: a local healing centre for psoriasis. Overnight in Sivas. [BD]



Day 5 and 6 SIVAS-ERZURUM:

Today we have a longer drive [6 hours] to get to Erzurum where we visit some of the best examples of Seljuk architecture. The Yakutiye medrese, once a Mongol seminary, is now the Turkish & Islamic Arts & Ethnographic museum [closed Monday]. We also visit the Grand Mosque [Ulu Camii] and the Double Minaret medrese - built in 1253 by the sultan as a Koranic Academy; and the three tombs adjacent to it, built for his daughters. We will also have time for a visit to the local Rüstem Paşa market, where black amber prayer beads are made and sold. 2 nights in Erzurum. [BD]

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Day 7 ERZURUM-KARS:

Kars, a town famous for its cheese [Kaşar] and the ruins of Ani. With history dating back to 5,000 B.C, it was the entrance to Anatolia via the Silk Road. Within the great city walls is the medieval city of Ani. The ruined city has a cathedral, churches, market, mosques and a bath complex. Ani overlooks a deep gorge and the Arpa Çay river which forms the border with Armenia. Overnight in Kars. [BD]

Day 8 KARS-HOPA:

This morning we will continue through the Kaçkar Mountains until we reach the Black Sea coast. The road to Hopa is stunningly scenic with the landscape changing dramatically as we near the Black Sea coast. Overnight in Hopa. [BD]

Day 9 HOPA - AYDER:

A quirky day of international travel! We will visit Batumi in Georgia with free time to wander through the shopping district and along the Black Sea boulevard. After lunch it's back to Turkey! We then drive up a valley inland to Ayder, a picturesque yayla (plateau) village famous for its hot springs and natural beauty. Time late in the afternoon to discover this beautiful little piece of Black Sea paradise. Overnight in Ayder. [BD]

Day 10 AYDER:

After a lazy start to the day we walk through a great forest to reach a beautiful waterfall. Free time after lunch to either use the hot springs or walk in the village. Overnight in Ayder. [BLD]

Day 11 AYDER-RIZE:

Back down to the coast and on to Rize, famous for its traditional textile style known as Rize Bezi; we may visit one of the shops to see examples of this material. Some free time in the local shopping area for finding lunch and meeting the local shop owners. Rize is also the home of Turkish tea, so we visit the Tea Research Institute and Gardens for a cup of local tea. The gardens here are vibrant with 50 shades of green. Overnight in Rize. [BD]



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Day 12 RIZE:

We drive along steep narrow roads to reach my hometown of Şimşirli. Today is devoted to taking it easy and enjoying the beauty of this area. Şimşirli hides itself behind a jungle of tea and bean fields. We will visit a delightful gem of a mosque, built entirely of chestnut and carved with manic mastery in 1849. There is a good chance of seeing local people picking tea and harvesting their crops. We may even join in for a while before a walk to my family home where I was born. Words truly fail to describe this day: this is Turkey's Switzerland.

Overnight in Rize. [BLD]



Day 13 RIZE-TRABZON:

We leave Rize and travel west along the coast to Trabzon, where we will spend the next 2 nights. Enroute we will visit a very interesting tea processing factory - a good chance to buy some tea from my hometown. Later we will drive uphill to the magical Uzungöl (long lake) for lunch and a walk around the lake. Overnight in Trabzon. [BD]

Day 14 TRABZON:

This morning we will travel 46 km via the winding roads of Altındere valley to reach Sumela Monastery. The monastery is the must-see attraction of the Black Sea region. Built on a 300 m cliff edge with 72 bishop's rooms, it is the most important historical site of this area. This afternoon, back in Trabzon, we will have time to visit the Aya Sofia Mosque [Church of Divine Wisdom]. The frescos and decorative facade really have the "wow factor". Overnight in Trabzon. [BD]

Day 15 TRABZON – ORDU-SAMSUN:

Another magnificent Black Sea coast drive brings us firstly to Giresun, the hazelnut capital of the world. Seventy percent of the world's hazelnuts come from this region. Our next stop is Ordu where we take a cable car to Boztepe lookout, the highest point of the city. After lunch we visit Paşaoğlu Mansion which now serves as the Ethnographic museum. The mansion demonstrates the degree to which the upper echelon of Ottoman society indulged in a luxurious lifestyle. A late afternoon drive to Samsun. Overnight in Samsun. [BD]

Day 16 SAMSUN – SINOP – ABANA:

Still heading west, we drive to Sinop, the home of the Greek philosopher Diogenes. This city is Anatolia's northernmost point and was once an important harbour used by the Pontic Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Seljuk Turks and Ottomans. The old prison castle, İnce Burun (pointy nose) and Hamsilos Bay are in this morning's tour program. After lunch we follow the coastline to the small coastal holiday town of Abana. This easily walkable and very pretty town's history dates back to the 7th century BC. The Kent Ormani (town forest) is a must with its majestic 500 year old plane trees. Overnight in Abana. (BD)

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Day 17 ABANA TO AMASRA:

After breakfast we travel to our final Black Sea coast destination of Amasra, a quaint town well known for good seafood. The town has a population of just 6,000 with the islands of Büyükada and Rabbit Island close by. We visit a Roman castle affording great views of the town and finish the morning with a short boat trip on the Black Sea. Free time in the afternoon to do your own thing in this pretty town. Overnight in Amasra. (BD)

Day 18 AMASRA –BEYPAZARI:

While Beypazarı was an important stopover on the trade route between Istanbul and Baghdad, the cobbled streets and white Ottoman buildings are the main draw cards for modern day visitors. The town is also well known for its coppersmiths, Telkari silverwork, good local food, traditional lifestyle and carrots! We wander through the cobbled streets and have lunch in a local restaurant. [BLD].

Day 19 ANKARA: Tour ends. Transfer to the airport after breakfast. [B]

