

THE SPIRIT OF PERSIA: A SIDE ORDER OF TURKEY

This describes the optional one-week extension of the two-week tour of Iran. Alan and Linda will definitely be doing the Turkey extension as described here, and are happy to make bookings for a few others to travel with them. It is also possible to do just part of this itinerary, e.g. just the train to Ankara, or as far as Konya.

ITINERARY

Wednesday 28 October: depart Tehran Wednesday evening for the train/boat journey to Ankara. This is a long and exciting train trip, and the several people I know who have done it in recent years say it is also special because of the very friendly atmosphere on the train, which becomes a party after leaving Iran. The train has couchette compartments and a restaurant car. We will be travelling northwest from Tehran, with a short stop on Thursday morning at Tabriz, with its Rumi associations. Our first train brings us to the eastern shore of lake Van, a huge high altitude lake, and we have a four hour boat crossing where a party atmosphere gets underway. We then pick up a Turkish train on the western end of the lake, also with couchettes and a restaurant car, which takes us to Ankara.

Saturday 31 October: our train is due in Ankara early on Saturday morning, but may be a bit late. From here, we catch the new high-speed train which takes only two hours to Konya. Our train booking will be on Saturday afternoon to Konya, so we will hopefully have a bit of time to look around Ankara on Saturday morning, and time to rest at the hotel in Konya. There is a weekly Dervish-Whirling ceremony in Konya on Saturday nights, so we will be able to attend that.



Sunday 1 November: the major reason to visit Konya is Rumi's Tomb: I went some years ago, and it is deeply evocative. I aim to book a hotel within walking distance of the Tomb, so after a leisurely start, we have all morning to be there.



After lunch, a car/minibus will take us to Cappadocia, which is around a three hour drive. We will stay in Goreme, an attractive small town well placed for the main attractions of the area. Possibly staying in one of the cave hotels.

Monday 2 November: today we will have a guided tour by car, organised by a local travel agent recommended in the Lonely Planet Guide. Here is their proposed itinerary:

The tour starts with a visit to Göreme Open Air Museum where you can see the world's most important Byzantine cave churches. Goreme Open Air Museum is listed as one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Our next stop will be

Pashabagi also called the Monks Valley because Christian hermits chose to locate hermit cells and churches in these three-headed pinnacles. The last stop before lunch will be Devrent Valley, also known as "Imagination Valley", this is the most surreal-looking landscape. We will have lunch in Avanos in one of the cave restaurants. We will end the day at Uchisar Castle, which is the highest point of Cappadocia and the view from the top is just brilliant.

Tuesday 3 November: a free morning for shopping, sightseeing or resting in Goreme. After an early lunch, the car will take us to Ankara, which is around a four hour journey. This should give us time for a rest at our hotel in Ankara, and then a special final dinner in town.



Wednesday 4 November: this is one of the days when there is a direct flight to London from Ankara.

COST: My estimated cost for the whole of this trip, including transport, hotels, meals and the guided tour is £720, but this is only an approximation.