

About Turkey

Area: 780,000 sq km (as big as NSW)

Highest Point: Mt Ararat (5883 m)

Capital: Ankara

Population: 70 million at the 2003 census; Istanbul 12 million, Ankara 3.7 million, Izmir 3 million, 32% of the population being concentrated in the northwest Marmara region. About one third of Turks are under 15 years old, less than 5% are over 65. In recent years over 300 people per week have been moving from rural and eastern Anatolia to greater Istanbul.

Language: Turkish, English is studied as second language at schools and 90% of people in tourism related fields speak English.

Religion: Officially 98% of Turks are Sunni Muslim, and 2% are Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant Christians and Jews but the State has no religion (i.e. secular).

Time: Turkish Standard Time is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time, i.e. 8 hours behind South-Eastern Australia. It advances by one hour in summer (Apr-Oct) to GMT +3.

Currency: Yeni Turkish Lira (YTL). 1 AUD = 1.02 YTL (March 2006)

Weights and Measures: Metric.

Electricity: 220 volts AC. Two-pronged round plug.



Geography

Turkey is a vast country that is sandwiched – both politically and geographically – between East and West, bordered by Greece and Bulgaria in the northwest, Iran, Armenia, Georgia to the East and Iraq and Syria to the Southeast. Turkey is as big as NSW with 3% of its land is in Europe and 97% in Asia. The two continents of Turkey are divided by the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles in the Northwest of the county. To the North lies the Black Sea, to the South the Mediterranean, and to the West the Aegean.

Altogether there is a total of approximately 8,000 km of coastline, varying from the inhospitable damp, mountainous Black Sea Coast to the thriving Mediterranean resorts, with yachts, sub-tropical gardens and discos.

80% of Turkey is 500m (1,640 ft) or more above sea level.

Climate

There are three main climatic zones in Turkey:

- The Marmara (which includes Istanbul), Aegean and Mediterranean regions. These have a typically Mediterranean climate with hot summers and mild winters, with temperatures rising the further South you go.
- The Black Sea region, which has warm summers, mild winters and relatively high rainfall throughout the year.
- The Central and Eastern Anatolian regions (including Ankara), which have more extreme hot, dry summers and cold winters.

Average Temperatures (C)

Region	JAN	APR	JUL	OCT
Marmara – Istanbul	7	16	28	19
Aegean – Izmir	9	20	30	21
Mediterranean – Antalya	11	22	32	23
Black Sea Region – Trabzon	8	16	16	13
Central Anatolia - Cappadocia	4	15	30	18
Eastern Anatolia – Erzurum	9	6	20	12

Economy

In recent years, a move towards a competitive free market (led by increasing privatisation) has generated remarkable economic growth, averaging about 7% per annum between 2002 and 2005. The advantages of greater foreign trade, rapid industrial growth and investment are now being balanced against conditioning low wages, higher than Australian inflation and rising consumer expectations. As a result of entering the customs union with the EU, imports have risen – and the foreign trade deficit.

Government

Turkey has a 400-member Grand National Assembly and a multi-party political system that is largely democratic in nature, though changes can seem volatile from the outside. Turkey is a member of the United Nations, an associate member of the European Union and a member of the EU Customs Union, the OECD, the Council of Europe and NATO.

Planning the Trip

Visas & Passports

Visa requirements for entering Turkey vary substantially according to your nationality. All travellers need a passport valid for at least six months. Citizens of the Australia, New Zealand, UK, Ireland, Austria, Italy, Israel, Portugal, and Spain require visas, which can be obtained at the point of entry into Turkey (not in advance from consulates). They currently cost the equivalent of US \$20, paid in cash. You will be issued with a multiple-entry tourist visa valid for 3 months. The tourist visa will be stamped into the passport.

Customs

You are allowed to bring into the country up to 200 cigarettes (400 if bought in a Turkish duty-free shop), 50 cigars, 200g pipe tobacco (500g if bought in Turkey), 75cl alcohol, 5 litres wine or spirits, 1 kg of chocolate and 1.5 kg of coffee. Possession of narcotics is treated as an extremely serious offence; penalties are harsh.

Exporting antiques

It is strictly forbidden to take antiques out of the country. Should you buy anything old or old-looking, be sure to have it validated by the seller, who should get a clearance certificate from the Department of Antiquities. Respectable carpet dealers in particular should be familiar with the procedure.

Health Matters

Turkey is a pretty safe country, as long as you are sensible. If you do fall ill the standard of healthcare is not high, so it is essential to have medical insurance. Most drugs are available without prescription from pharmacies (eczane).

Money Matters

The currency is the Turkish Lira (TL). Unlimited foreign currency can be brought into Turkey. Although you can bring up to US \$5,000 worth of Turkish Lira, it is better to arrive with a small amount of Turkish currency. One Australian dollar is worth 1.02 Turkish Liras (March 2006).

Obtaining Cash

Banks are plentiful in Turkey (see business hours, for times), but with the increasing number of cash dispensers (ATMs) you can easily go your whole stay without entering one.

Travelers' Cheques

These can be cashed at the foreign exchange desks of banks, and at post offices, but it is useful to bring a supply of foreign currency, whether US dollars or Euros. To cash travelers' cheques you will need your passport.

Credit cards and Debit Cards

Most major cards, including Visa, Switch, Amex and Mastercard, are accepted by more and more shops, restaurants, hotels and petrol stations.

ATM's

There are 24-hour cash dispensers, accepting credit cards and bank cards with PIN numbers, on every street corner; Isbank alone has over 1,000 all over Turkey. The machines usually offer you a choice of five or six languages in which to conduct your transaction, but they issue only Turkish Lira.

Foreign Exchange Offices

'Doviz' are usually the best places to make a straight exchange of foreign currency, almost always offering a better rate for cash than the banks. US Dollars and Euros can attract a better rate than less frequently traded currencies. These offices rarely accept travellers' cheques.

TAXES

Taxes, chiefly VAT (KDV) at varying rates, are included in the prices of some goods and services. But you may see them itemised separately as a component of the price on a bill or receipt. Some stores offer VAT-free shopping for tourists living outside the European Union (look out for signs in the window).

Religious Festivals

Turkish religious holidays are linked to the lunar calendar and move back 11 or 12 days each year. Secular festivals also move to coincide with weekends and precise dates can change annually. Contact our office to keep up to date. During these major holidays, shops and businesses are closed, though local shops will usually reopen on the second or third day.

Public Holidays

1 January	New Year's Day
23 April	National Sovereignty and Children's Day (folk dancing)
19 May	Ataturk's Commemoration and Youth and Sports Day
30 August	Victory Day
29 October	Republic Day

What to bring

Clothes Your needs will vary greatly according to the part of Turkey you will be visiting and the time of year. In the height of summer, light, cotton clothing for the Marmara, Aegean and Mediterranean areas is essential, including a long loose cotton shirt to cover your arms and shoulders against the hottest sun, a shady hat and a high-factor sunscreen, especially if you intend to visit archaeological sites where there can be little or no shade.

For the Black Sea Region you may need a light sweater in the evening (even in summer), a light waterproof jacket and water-resistant footwear. Humidity is high. In Central and Eastern Anatolia summer evenings can be cool.

Footwear Comfortable, sturdy shoes, are essential for tramping over historical and archaeological sites. Even the pavements on city streets can be uneven or cobbled.

Wet-weather gear Although Turkey is often regarded as hot all year around, winter travellers will soon discover that it has as much rain, snow and ice as most of Europe; parts of the country are very high and should be treated with respect. Especially in the north, tough water-resistant footwear and a raincoat or jacket will prove invaluable.

Insect repellent Mosquitoes (non-malarial) can be a severe annoyance in summer, so bring a good repellent. Burning coils, or plug-in electric anti-bug devices that you use with a tablet, are available locally.

Security & Crime

Turkey has an enviably low crime record. This reflects Turkish society: restricted access to guns, low incidence of drug use, respect for law and order, and most important of all, close-knit communities and enduring family ties. Foreigners and tourists are regarded as guests, so are very well treated; in normal circumstances you can expect the police to be polite and helpful.

Tourist areas are regularly patrolled by special 'Turizm' or Foreigners' Police, who should do their best to help you and should speak some English.

Turkish Baths (Hamam)

As a spectator sport, nothing surpasses a 'hamam' – be sure to visit one during your stay. Many people are put off the idea because they simply don't know what to expect (or what to do). Don't worry. The locals will happily steer you straight.

The rules are simple, based on the old Roman Baths or the Scandinavian Sauna. The sexes are usually segregated either in different baths or by set hours for each. Nudity is not the norm, so wear swimming costume or ask for a sarong (pestemal). You will also be given a towel and wooden clogs (takunya).

Change in the reception area. From here, you move through to a private side-room to wash down before entering the central hot steam room. In the old baths, this is often a spectacular room with domes, arches, marble and tiles, at the centre of which is a large marble slab. You lie face down on this and are given an energetic face, foot and/or full-body massage, or a scrub down with a camel-hair glove.

Most five-star hotels offer luxurious, modern hamams, but some more traditional bath houses are well worth a visit.

Shopping

Shopping in Turkey can be a delight, it is always fascinating and is sometimes even educational. High-fashion clothes can be bought very cheaply, as Turkey has a booming cotton industry and has become a cheap source of manufacture for the West. Turkish leather is well-known, but the clothing and bags are usually better than shoes.

Look carefully at the quality of what you are buying: it varies enormously and when you pay more, you often get something that is much better made. It is hard to find a good bargain in the tourist areas; try to shop in the more out-of-the-way villages and towns, where you will probably find better quality.

Where to Shop

Turkey offers many different shopping experiences, from the glitzy to the more gritty. There are vast user-friendly shopping centres, like American shopping malls, complete with parking, supermarket, cinemas, food courts and international designer labels.

There is the older version of the same idea, the amazing Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, a veritable labyrinth of shops and workshops, selling every imaginable product. Excellent local weekly street markets, best for Turkey's wonderful fresh produce if you are self-catering, plus flea markets can be found.

What to Buy

Textiles, clothing, carpets, pottery, metalwork, semi-precious and precious stones and jewellery, leather, glass all fall in to various categories of quality and price. You can easily go home with a bag full of shoddily made but amusing souvenirs with a Turkish flavour.

Carpets & Kilims

A carpet is a hand made rug with a raised pile, a kilim is flat woven. They can be made from cotton, wool, silk or a mixture. Designs and techniques are regional.

You do not need to be an expert to buy a good carpet, but it helps. Within Turkey, certain places are carpet trading centres. The Grand Bazaar and surrounding are in Istanbul is one, but Cappadocia in central Anatolia is another, as dealers travel there to buy and makers to sell. Buying a carpet can rarely be done in a hurry, and can take half a day of tea drinking and discussions, enjoyed by both customer and dealer. If you are serious, it would be worth doing a little background reading before hand. For detailed information, Go Holiday Turkey staff can give you expert information on Turkish carpets and Kilims.