TURKEY TRAVEL TIPS

Insurance
Travel insurance is a useful addition to your airline ticket purchase since this covers delayed or cancelled flights and lost luggage. Overseas medical insurance is a must requirement. Check with your insurer and find out whether you are covered overseas and what you must do if medical care is required. Also learn whether you have medical repatriation in case you need to be flown home for care. If you do not have overseas medical insurance, you should purchase a temporary policy that covers your period of stay overseas. Usually Turkish hospitals and clinics require immediate payment before your release.

Visa
According to the new VISA regulation, you need to get Turkish Visa before arrival online www.eviza.gov.tr The website allows you to select a date maximum 90 days ahead of today, and then your visa will be valid for 180 days after the selected date. If you do not get a visa before arrival, you may risk to lose time at the long lines in front of few visa kiosks still serving at the Istanbul Airport. The current visa fee for US Citizens is $20.

Passport
Visitors are not allowed to enter Turkey if their passport does not have enough free space on the pages for Turkish entry and exit stamps. You need to check your passport, and, if necessary, either get additional visa pages added to their passports or apply for a new passport.

It is extremely important to carry your passport with you at all times in a safe place. Never leave it in your hotel room. Perhaps wear a waist or chest pack to carry money and your passport. The only place where a replacement passport can be obtained quickly is in Ankara. To replace one is a major endeavor (I’ve had to help individuals do this on a previous trip), and it can consume several days of your valuable time in Turkey. Carry a photocopy of your passport in a separate place as well as provide your tour leader with a copy.

Tipping
The guide and driver for the tour are trained professionals so it is customary to collect a tip for them from each tour participant. This is split 2/3-1/3 between the guide and driver. Please check with your travel agency for its recommended rate for tipping. No tips are expected at the meals served in the hotel or for morning baggage pickup. This is usually built into the tour price. At check-in bellboys are available to assist you. One lira or $1 per bag is usually sufficient. Hotel elevators are usually small and not created for all group members to go to their rooms with baggage at the same time. American groups usually want to take their own baggage so this process can be slow and frustrating. If possible, let the bellboys bring the baggage with the service elevator and pay a small tip. If you stay in a hotel more than one night, it is nice to leave a small tip to those cleaning the rooms. In Turkey it is not customary to tip taxi drivers, and in restaurants the usual tip is 10%.

Money
Do NOT bring traveler’s checks as they are almost impossible to cash in Turkey. Dollars are accepted everywhere, but for most purchases on the street it is awkward to pay with dollars and you will not get a good exchange rate. So upon arrival in Turkey exchange $50 or $100 dollars for Turkish lira at a döviz (foreign exchange). There are also ATM machines everywhere so an easy way to obtain lira is to use your ATM card (ATM=Automatic Turkish Money). At the Istanbul Atatürk Airport both are located in the baggage claim area so purchase some lira while waiting for your suitcases. In small towns it is very difficult to change money so do it before you leave the cities. Charge cards such as Visa and MasterCard are accepted at many locations, but be aware that usually these cards charge a 2–3% commission fee for overseas purchases. If you plan to use your credit card, perhaps to buy a Turkish carpet, inform your credit card company ahead of time and inform them of your travel dates in Turkey (do this also if you plan to make ATM withdrawals). Otherwise, a security restriction may be imposed on your card’s use.

Clothing
Summer weather is hot (90°F) during the day so dress accordingly. Be sure to bring a hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen. Although Turkey is a Muslim country, it is a liberal one in most areas (the east and southeast, however, are conservative). Clothing is casual, especially in the tourist areas of western and southern Turkey. Jeans are acceptable for everyone. Shorts are acceptable also, especially in the resort areas. However, in the small towns and rural areas women in shorts attract attention. In those areas capris or slacks are preferable. Bare legs are not allowed in mosques so dress appropriately. Remember: modest dress is a virtue in Muslim countries. Bring a swimming suit because most hotels have pools and a few even have thermal hot springs available for bathing. Since there a lot of walking, be sure to bring comfortable shoes, such as hiking boots or walking shoes. Winter weather can be cold so bring a warm coat and warm undergarments, especially for travel in central Turkey and in the mountains. During the spring there is usually rain so bring a raincoat or poncho as well as a small umbrella.

Walking in Turkey
One of the most challenging aspects of getting around in Turkey is walking. Sidewalks are uneven, so if you fail to pay attention to the surface, it is easy to stumble and fall. Bikes, motorcycles, and even cars can be on sidewalks so pay attention to them. Jaywalking is common to cross streets, but be careful because drivers won’t stop for you. Even when crossing at a light, be watchful because red-light runners are common. Look even when crossing one-way streets because sometimes such restrictions are ignored. Turkish builders have a love affair with steps, and you will see them everywhere in hotels and restaurants. Often they are uneven or in unexpected places so be watchful. Also, the frequent use of marble and stone makes these surfaces extremely slippery when wet. So proceed carefully on wet floors. As one who has fallen several times and seen innumerable visitors fall, I urge special care and attention in this area.

Shopping
Shopping is fun in Turkey, and expect to do some bargaining! (However, many stores have set prices so there is no bargaining.) There are many wonderful souvenirs and gifts to buy. Probably the major purchase to consider is that of a carpet or kilim. Depending on the size and quality, the price might run from $200 to $5000. Places where quality carpets can be purchased at fair prices can be recommended by guides and travel agencies. If you need to match a certain color or fabric, bring a swatch with you. Also, if you need a certain size, determine the measurement in meters beforehand since carpets are sized using metric measurements.

Passport
Visitors are not allowed to enter Turkey if their passport does not have enough free space on the pages for Turkish entry and exit stamps. You need to check your passport, and, if necessary, either get additional visa pages added to their passports or apply for a new passport.

It is extremely important to carry your passport with you at all times in a safe place. Never leave it in your hotel room. Perhaps wear a waist or chest pack to carry money and your passport. The only place where a replacement passport can be obtained quickly is in Ankara. To replace one is a major endeavor (I’ve had to help individuals do this on a previous trip), and it can consume several days of your valuable time in Turkey. Carry a photocopy of your passport in a separate place as well as provide your tour leader with a copy.

Tipping
The guide and driver for the tour are trained professionals so it is customary to collect a tip for them from each tour participant. This is split 2/3-1/3 between the guide and driver. Please check with your travel agency for its recommended rate for tipping. No tips are expected at the meals served in the hotel or for morning baggage pickup. This is usually built into the tour price. At check-in bellboys are available to assist you. One lira or $1 per bag is usually sufficient. Hotel elevators are usually small and not created for all group members to go to their rooms with baggage at the same time. American groups usually want to take their own baggage so this process can be slow and frustrating. If possible, let the bellboys bring the baggage with the service elevator and pay a small tip. If you stay in a hotel more than one night, it is nice to leave a small tip to those cleaning the rooms. In Turkey it is not customary to tip taxi drivers, and in restaurants the usual tip is 10%.

Money
Do NOT bring traveler’s checks as they are almost impossible to cash in Turkey. Dollars are accepted everywhere, but for most purchases on the street it is awkward to pay with dollars and you will not get a good exchange rate. So upon arrival in Turkey exchange $50 or $100 dollars for Turkish lira at a döviz (foreign exchange). There are also ATM machines everywhere so an easy way to obtain lira is to use your ATM card (ATM=Automatic Turkish Money). At the Istanbul Atatürk Airport both are located in the baggage claim area so purchase some lira while waiting for your suitcases. In small towns it is very difficult to change money so do it before you leave the cities. Charge cards such as Visa and MasterCard are accepted at many locations, but be aware that usually these cards charge a 2–3% commission fee for overseas purchases. If you plan to use your credit card, perhaps to buy a Turkish carpet, inform your credit card company ahead of time and inform them of your travel dates in Turkey (do this also if you plan to make ATM withdrawals). Otherwise, a security restriction may be imposed on your card’s use.

Clothing
Summer weather is hot (90°F) during the day so dress accordingly. Be sure to bring a hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen. Although Turkey is a Muslim country, it is a liberal one in most areas (the east and southeast, however, are conservative). Clothing is casual, especially in the tourist areas of western and southern Turkey. Jeans are acceptable for everyone. Shorts are acceptable also, especially in the resort areas. However, in the small towns and rural areas women in shorts attract attention. In those areas capri pants or slacks are preferable. Bare legs are not allowed in mosques so dress appropriately. Remember: modest dress is a virtue in Muslim countries. Bring a swimming suit because most hotels have pools and a few even have thermal hot springs available for bathing. Since there a lot of walking, be sure to bring comfortable shoes, such as hiking boots or walking shoes. Winter weather can be cold so bring a warm coat and warm undergarments, especially for travel in central Turkey and in the mountains. During the spring there is usually rain so bring a raincoat or poncho as well as a small umbrella.

Walking in Turkey
One of the most challenging aspects of getting around in Turkey is walking. Sidewalks are uneven, so if you fail to pay attention to the surface, it is easy to stumble and fall. Bikes, motorcycles, and even cars can be on sidewalks so pay attention to them. Jaywalking is common to cross streets, but be careful because drivers won’t stop for you. Even when crossing at a light, be watchful because red-light runners are common. Look even when crossing one-way streets because sometimes such restrictions are ignored. Turkish builders have a love affair with steps, and you will see them everywhere in hotels and restaurants. Often they are uneven or in unexpected places so be watchful. Also, the frequent use of marble and stone makes these surfaces extremely slippery when wet. So proceed carefully on wet floors. As one who has fallen several times and seen innumerable visitors fall, I urge special care and attention in this area.

Shopping
Shopping is fun in Turkey, and expect to do some bargaining! (However, many stores have set prices so there is no bargaining.) There are many wonderful souvenirs and gifts to buy. Probably the major purchase to consider is that of a carpet or kilim. Depending on the size and quality, the price might run from $200 to $5000. Places where quality carpets can be purchased at fair prices can be recommended by guides and travel agencies. If you need to match a certain color or fabric, bring a swatch with you. Also, if you need a certain size, determine the measurement in meters beforehand since carpets are sized using metric measurements.
International Telephone Calls
If you plan to talk to family or friends in the US, it is best to use a calling card from your long distance carrier. Ask beforehand what the access code is to call from Turkey. Be prepared, however, to pay an access fee at some hotels, which can be expensive. There is a 7 hour time difference between Eastern time and Turkey; 10 hours with Pacific time. It is also possible to buy a Turkish phone card at the PTT (post office) and call from the nearest pay phone. However, sometimes these are not available at the hotels. Calls using Turk Telecom are usually the cheapest option. If you bring a cell phone, make sure it has international capabilities or is able to roam using one of Turkey’s excellent cell phone providers.

Smoking
It seems like everyone in Turkey smokes. However, the good news is that there is now a ban on smoking indoors in public places. So the smokers now congregate outdoors, which is challenging if you like to eat outside. If you are susceptible to cigarette smoke or have allergies, be prepared for it with medication. Some of the hotels may have non-smoking rooms so ask for them when you make your hotel reservations.

Wireless Connections and Internet Cafes
Most tourist hotels usually have a wireless connection either in the rooms or in the lobby, and unlike the US, this service is typically free. You can use Skype or another VOI service to contact friends and family, thereby bypassing telephones. If you don’t bring a laptop, there are many inexpensive internet cafes in Turkey. Be prepared occasionally to struggle with the Turkish keyboard, especially with its undottedı.

Bathrooms (Tuvalets, WCs)
Hotels and tourist restaurants have good, western-style facilities. But outside the cities bathrooms can be a challenge in Turkey, especially for women. Be prepared to pay a small fee at most public restrooms. In case of an emergency, be aware that many toilets away from tourist areas are squatties, not sit-down toilets. Have a roll of toilet paper or pack of tissues available just in case you need it. Also, many Turkish toilets (outside of hotels) are not equipped to handle toilet paper, so throw it in the nearby basket.

Health/Medical
No special shots are required before going to Turkey. However, you should be current with your shots, especially tetanus. You may want to bring a stomach medication such as Imodium in case of diarrhea. Eating yogurt regularly at breakfast usually helps to alleviate potential stomach problems. Drinking Coca-Cola is also good for the stomach. If you are susceptible to motion sickness in planes or boats, you may want to purchase some Dramamine. There is also a patch available called Transderm Scop. If you need medicine while in Turkey, purchasing it is easy because most medications can be purchased over the counter at a drugstore (eczane) without a prescription.

Food and Water
Turkey has wonderful cuisine so eating is a culinary delight. Breakfasts and dinners at the hotels are usually buffet style with an abundance of food. Food in hotels is prepared with tourists in mind, so you can eat everything without a worry including fruit and produce. Food purchased on the street is usually not a problem either; however, always wash fruit and vegetables purchased from street vendors. As anywhere, if the food does not taste right, don’t eat it! In Turkey it is advisable to drink only bottled water. This is sold everywhere, and you should carry a bottle always, even using it to brush your teeth.

Coffee
Coffee at hotels is normally instant (Nescafe), made in large pots and often weaker than Americans like. Turkish coffee is not drunk at breakfast so don’t ask for it. So if you need a good cup of coffee in the morning, consider bringing a coffee cup with a built-in press pot at Starbucks along with a pound of coffee ground especially for the French press. Or you can bring a pour-over coffeemaker with paper filters. There is always hot water at breakfast, so you make your own and have a great cup of coffee in the morning.

Photography
If you are using film (a rarity these days), it is best to purchase it in advance. Most speeds are available in Turkey but more expensive and sometimes dated. Photos and videos can be taken at almost every site. However, flash photography is usually forbidden in museums. So practice turning your flash off before making the trip. Adapters or transformers for use with the 220 volt system are needed to charge digital cameras and camcorders. Digital cameras work best with lithium batteries, and these are usually not available in Turkey so buy them before the trip. Cameras using tripods are not allowed in museums or excavation areas; monopods are all right.

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

LOCAL TIME G.M.T + 2 HOURS

TAP WATER It has been chlorinated but may have strong taste. Bottles Spring water is suggested.

ELECTRICITY 220 Volts AC. Cycles 50 Mz.

RELIGION Moslem. In addition to the Mosques, Synagogues, Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches are available to the worshippers.

CURRENCY The new Turkish Lira is divided into 100 New Kurus (cents). The coins are 1, 5, 10, 25, 50 New Kurus and the banknotes are in 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, and 200 Turkish Lira.

EXCHANGE RATE 1 USDollar is equal to 2.16 Turkish Lira (as of September 3, 2014)