

Golden beaches, water sports, and ancient temples, or a sunny slice of western Turkey

# Ephesus & Roman Turkey

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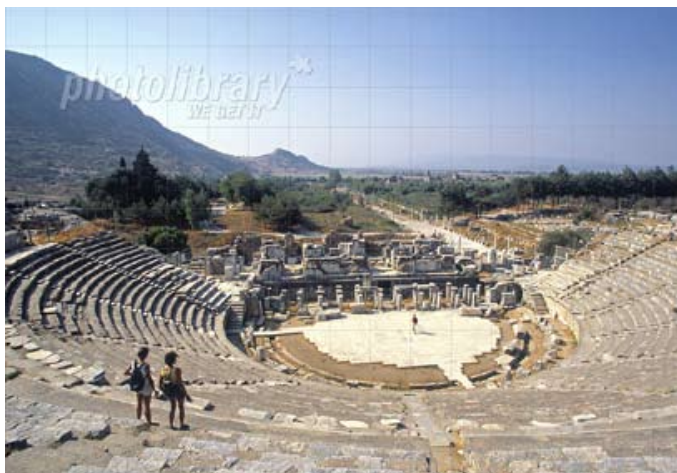
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An ancient sculpted head from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias

## Ephesus & Around

Outside of İstanbul's historical sights, the ruins of ancient Ephesus attract the highest number of Turkey's visitors. Just 2 miles (3 km) west of Selçuk and 52 miles (84 km) south of Izmir, the site dates from the fourth century b.c., when the harborside city relocated to take advantage of the Aegean's shifting coastline. Its perfectly preserved temples, merchants' houses, and theaters are breathtaking.



The ruins of the Roman theater in Ephesus, Turkey

### Ephesus Archaeological Site

📍 2 miles (3 km) from Selçuk

💰 \$\$\$\$; terraced houses additional \$\$\$

### Ephesus

Entering from the **Upper Gate**, the path heads straight toward the upper **agora** (market), passing the **Baths of Varius** on the right before reaching the **Odeon**, or parliament. Clamber up the tiered rows, that seated 1,500 in the second century, for views over the **Prytaneum** (Palace of Council) and two **temples** next door. Two statues of Artemis (exhibited in Selçuk's Efes Müzesi, see p. 200), originally housed in the nearby **Temple of Artemis**, were discovered here.

The central colonnaded road dips downhill, before opening out onto the **Pollio Fountain** and **Domitian Temple** (both first century A.D.) on the left, and the first-century b.c. **Tomb of Memmius** and **Monumental Fountain** (first through fourth centuries A.D.) on the right. Keep an eye out for the **Gate of Hercules**, which flanks the start of **Curetes Street**. During Ephesus' heyday, this street was lined with shops, each vendor positioned between two columns.

Passing the first-century A.D. **Temple of Trajan** (its sculptures

now in Selçuk's Efes Müzesi), the stunning **Temple of Hadrian**, built on the occasion of Emperor Hadrian's second-century A.D. visit to the city, was restored during the fourth century. Behind it are the public **latrines** and the **Baths of Skolasticia**. The bathing complex—built during the second century A.D. and extensively remodeled by the eponymous Skolasticia during the fourth century—was originally three stories, but only the top floor is currently visible.

The **terraced houses** sit on the opposite side of Curetes Street. Although there is a supplemental charge, Terrace House 2—a warren of six first- and second-century luxury dwellings still undergoing restorations—is absolutely unmissable. The homes were abandoned after a series of severe earthquakes during the third century, and their treasures have remained relatively undisturbed. Painstaking reassembly of the banquet hall's marble-lined walls (discovered shattered into 120,000 pieces) takes place in Unit 6, while Units 2 and 3 boast superb wall murals and mosaic floors.

Back in the brilliant sunshine, the impressive **Library of Celsus** is one of the site's highlights. Consul Gaius Julius Aquila (A.D. 110) had the library constructed in honor of his father, the proconsul of the province of Asia; it was completed in A.D. 135. Copies of the four sculptures representing intellectual virtues (the originals are in Vienna's Ephesus Museum) sit in niches on the library's facade. The building once held thousands of texts, but these were burned and

### EXPERIENCE: Visiting Ephesus

Few ancient sites have the impact of a day at Ephesus. As you step slowly through the numerous areas of ruins, you begin to feel a connection with the departed life of this once great city. Set out early to avoid the crowds and enter from the Upper Gate, in order to proceed slowly downhill as the heat of the day increases. There's nowhere to buy drinks or snacks within the ruins, so pack a large bottle of water, no matter what the season. Although all major points of interest are labeled in Turkish and English, with the exception of lengthy descriptions posted within the terraced houses, there are no detailed explanations. History buffs may choose to hire an audio guide (\$\$\$) or one of the many multilingual guides (\$\$\$\$ per group, two hours) lingering near the site's entrance. Note that most of the hotels in Selçuk (2 miles/3 km east) will shuttle you to and from the ruins for free.

destroyed by invading Goths during the third century.

To the right of the library's entrance, the **Mazeus & Mithriadates Gate** marks the entrance to the lower agora. Funded by former slaves Mazeus and Mithriadates, this 52-foot (16 m) triple archway was erected in imperial gratitude for freedom bestowed upon them.

Back up on **Marble Street** and heading northeast, visitors will pass the town's **brothel** on the right—note the etched footprint and female figure, an ancient advertisement for the world's oldest profession, on a left-hand paving stone. Ephesus' massive 25,000-seat **theater** (first through second centuries A.D.) towers up to

## Hellenistic & Roman Turkey

Excavations have uncovered ancient Greek settlements all across Turkey, particularly in the Anatolian area. The following are some of western Turkey's most prominent ancient sites open to explore. Find ancient Greek coins at Miletus, the Great Altar of Zeus at Pergamum, and imposing, sculpted stone heads at Didyma and Aphrodisias.



Aphrodisias is named after its Temple of Aphrodite.

### Pergamum

Around 62 miles (100 km) north of Izmir, the hilltop city of **Pergamum** reached its zenith under the reign of King Eumenes II, who ruled from 197-159 b.c. Its **library** was one of the greatest of the era, housing 200,000 precious texts. The sprawling site's most famous structure, the **Great Altar of Zeus**, is permanently located at the Pergamum Museum in Berlin, although the local museum, **Bergama Müzesi** (*Zafer Mahallesi, Cumhuriyet Caddesi 6, tel 0232/631 2883, closed Mon., \$*), exhibits a scale model.

### Priene, Miletus, & Didyma

Even during summer's peak, you can expect to ramble around the ancient Greek ruins of **Priene**, around 22 miles (35 km) south of

Ephesus, in relative solitude. At first a harbor city built at the foot of a cliff during the fourth century b.c., Priene is believed to have been moved around 10 miles (16 km) away from the sea when it looked possible that silt from the Meander River might bury it. The city was discovered in the 11th century b.c. and of particular interest are the **Temple of Athena**, built under the auspices of Alexander the Great, and the site's small but well-preserved **theater**. Also found here are an **agora**, a **Prytaneion** (seat of government), and a **Bouleterion** (council house).

Like Priene, 14 miles (22 km) to its north, **Miletus** too was an affluent port, although its origins long pre-date those of its neighbor: Over two-and-a-half millennia ago—from around 700 b.c.—the city was thriving. An expansive

### INSIDER TIP:

**Aphrodisias is less busy than sites like Ephesus and can be missed if traveling by public transport, so try and join a tour or use your own transport and park in the small lot.**

—SALLY MCFALL  
*National Geographic contributor*

site perfect for roaming around, today Miletus consists of ancient Greek ruins (its still intact and enormous **theater**), Roman ruins (the town's impressive **harbor**), Byzantine ruins (the **fortress** that flanks the theater) and medieval ones (the alluring, crumbling mosque, **İlyas Bey Camii**).

**Didyma's** marble **Temple** (fourth century b.c.) was a shrine to its much-consulted oracle, Apollo. The renowned spot was under the ownership of nearby Miletus, and a ten-mile (17 km) **Sacred Way**, no longer visible, connected the two. Look for the temple's famous sculpted **Medusa head** (see photograph right).

### Aphrodisias

Set 124 miles (200 km) east of Didyma, the Roman city of **Aphrodisias** enjoyed far-reaching fame due to skilled local artisans and their exquisite marble sculptures. Today, a good number of these impressive artworks

can be viewed at the site's excellent **museum** (*Geyre, Aydin, tel 0256/448 80 86, closed Mon.*), which was renovated and expanded in 2009. Of particular note are the 80 sculptures excavated from the **Sebastion** (Temple of the Emperors, A.D. 20-60), and a large, detailed depiction of Aphrodite.

The ancient city's most important structure is the **Temple of Aphrodite** (late first and second centuries A.D.): It was here that the local goddess Aphrodite of Aphrodisias was worshipped. However, Aphrodisias' **stadium** is surely the most breathtaking of the site's ruins. Its long, slender ring of 22 rows (30,000 seats) patchy but entirely intact, the stadium measures a grandiose 860 x 194 feet (262 x 59 m), larger even than the original Olympic stadium in Greece.



The famous head of Medusa at Didyma, dates from the 4th century B.C.

### Dr. Kenan Tefvik Erim (1929-1990)

Although its archaeological digs have been ongoing since the start of the 20th century, Aphrodisias owes its careful excavation almost exclusively to one man: **Dr. Kenan Tefvik Erim**. Istanbul-born, but raised between Switzerland and the United States, Erim came across the site in 1959 partially covered by the modern town of Geyre, which has since

relocated—and was instantly enchanted. Over the next 30 years, the dedicated archaeologist oversaw all of the site's precise digs.

Upon his death in 1990 in Ankara, Erim was buried at Aphrodisias as he had requested. His neatly tended grave sits near the site's double-gated **Tören Kapısı** (A.D. 200).

## Pamukkale & Hierapolis

The town of Pamukkale, located 12 miles (20 km) outside of the region's major city, Denizli, is situated at the base of the travertine cliffs that have become one of Turkey's top sights. Another major attraction on the hill above is the ancient site of Hierapolis, which translates as "sacred city." The thermal waters of this site are deemed healing, and consequently attract thousands of international tourists and locals alike.



Limestone terraces with travertine pools in Pamukkale

### Pamukkale & Hierapolis Tourism

📍 Örenyeri  
Pamukkale  
☎ (0258) 272  
20 77

[www.pamukkale.gov.tr](http://www.pamukkale.gov.tr)

### Pamukkale

Translated as "cotton castle," Pamukkale has been attracting visitors, plus more permanent residents, for thousands of years. The ancient city of **Hierapolis** was built on the plateau atop these snow-white, travertine (solidified calcium carbonate) cliffs to make use of its 17 healing springs. More recently, particularly during the 1980s, tourists mobbed the unique site. Five hotels were actually built on its precious slopes (and since demolished) before it

was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1988.

Today, the luminescent pools are heavily protected. Gushing streams are artificially redirected, allowing the natural chalky deposits to slowly rebuild areas damaged in the past. It is possible to hike up though the travertine pools, keeping to a wide, well-marked path. However, shoes are not allowed (which makes the normally toe-tingling trek a chilly one in winter). You can also swim (no additional ticket necessary) in the pools along this central route. Alternatively,

### EXPERIENCE: Visiting Cleopatra's Pool

Swimming below the warm bubbling waters of Cleopatra's Pool is like being an aquatic explorer visiting a sunken city. The mineral-rich waters steam away at a constant 96.8°F (36°C) at the heart of Hierapolis. The pool is open daily, its turquoise waters shimmering over ancient columns that tumbled down during a seventh-century earthquake. Be sure to bring your bathing suit, a towel and goggles to get a good view

underwater. Taking a dip in the healing springs is idyllic, particularly early in the morning or during the late afternoon. Buy your ticket (valid for two hours) from the desk on the left as you enter the complex, then head to the low yellow building on the far right, which houses changing rooms. You can store your belongings in the nearby lockers for free before heading for a swim in the central Cleopatra's Pool (\$\$\$; 6–12 years old, \$\$; under 6 free).

### INSIDER TIP:

Photographers should note that travertine is reflective, and the pools take on a stunning rose or golden glow early in the morning and at dusk.

—TOM JACKSON  
*National Geographic contributor*

access is possible from the top, via the ruins of Hierapolis.

### Hierapolis

Pergamum's Eumenes II (see p. 202) laid the foundations of this Hellenistic city during the third century b.c. However, it was when Hierapolis came under Roman rule, around a century later, that it became a renowned urban center, its sprawling ruins still standing today.

Past the Antique Pool Complex is where Hierapolis' oracle, Apollo Kareios, conversed with priestesses through the toxic gases emitted from the **Plutonium**, next to the

**Sanctuary of Apollo**, dating from the first through third centuries A.D. Just beyond, the impressive third-century **theater** offers towering vistas over the entire site. The **Martyrion of St. Philip** (fifth century A.D.), a ten-minute stroll north-eastward, marks the site where St. Philip was stoned to death in A.D. 80. The **agora** (second century), colonnaded **Frontinus Street** (first through sixth centuries A.D.), and the **necropolis** (first through third centuries A.D.) are all en route to the Northern Gate.

In three vaulted rooms within the central Roman Baths, the **Hierapolis Archaeology Museum** offers a clear, bilingual display that includes statues of gods, gladiator reliefs, coins, tools, and sarcophagi. Finds come both from Hierapolis and nearby archaeological digs, like **Laodicea**, 6 miles (10 km) south of Hierapolis—an important religious site during the Byzantine era.

Shuttles (\$) run from outside the Antique Pool Complex to the theater, necropolis, and South Gate. Shuttles to the North Gate are free. ■

### Hierapolis Archaeology Museum

📍 Hierapolis  
☎ (0258) 272  
20 34  
🕒 Closed Mon.  
💰 \$

### Cleopatra's Pool

📍 Pamukkale  
☎ (0258) 272  
20 24  
💰 \$\$\$\$

[www.pamukkalethermal.com](http://www.pamukkalethermal.com)