

# FOR ALL THE FAMILY

Turkey's beautiful beaches, welcoming vibe and diverse setting provide a rich and exciting destination for a family holiday, finds **Emma Johnson**

A vibrant and diverse country, Turkey is at once ancient and beautiful, modern and unique. Striking geography – from golden beaches to underground cave systems – meet bustling cities and traditional fishing ports, all coming together in a culture brimming with good food, energy, colour and warmth. For families, this is a captivating world just waiting to be discovered. Hiking through the dramatic landscape of Cappadocia, which charms and beguiles with every step, or soaking up the sights and sounds of the thoroughly modern Istanbul, offers opportunities for learning and discovery at every turn. Exploring Turkey as a family is about creating shared moments in a place that has found a unique balance between heritage and innovation.

The area's rich history means that there are no end of historic sites to uncover – at relics such as Ephesus, Ani, Pergamon and Aphrodisias, children can get a real idea of what it must have been like for those people who frequented the sites more than 2,000 years ago. For those kids who want to explore even further back in time, Istanbul's Jurassic World is one of the country's most popular attractions, complete with 4D cinema and excavation workshops.

Turkey is located in a region that experiences all four seasons in glorious detail, and one of the best ways to experience it off the beaten track is on a jeep safari. Available throughout the country from Bodrum to the Black Sea, each safari is different and is the perfect way for visitors of any age to experience the landscape.

Its varied topography also means that activities extend beyond the typical beach-based fun. Thrill-seeking teens can even take to the skies for a tandem paragliding experience they'll never forget.

Children in Turkey are very much the centre of the family unit, and they'll likely be spoiled by waiters, hotel staff and locals. Should they deserve further treats, sweet options abound – from syrupy baklava to *dondurma*, a traditional ice cream and, naturally, *lokum*, widely known as Turkish delight. ©



## ON THE UP

Last year, more than half of the world's hot-air balloon trips took place in Cappadocia. Right: the Rahmi M Koç Museum in Istanbul



**HIDDEN DEPTHS**

From top: Basilica Cistern; see Istanbul from a different perspective with a boat trip on the Bosphorus river



**EXPLORING THE CITY**

Sprawling, beautiful Istanbul, bisected by the azure-blue Bosphorus, is an endlessly exciting city to explore with children, and also provides a great opportunity for learning about ancient culture and the unique blend of East and West that is found here. The Hagia Sophia is a wonderful place to start your journey. Now a museum, it has a fascinating past, and its sheer size and extraordinary frescoes have a captivating appeal for any age, while close by the Blue Mosque is a gorgeous building both inside and out, and an unrivalled example of Islamic art. Older children will also love the many underground cisterns around the city, of which Basilica Cistern and the Serefiye Cistern are two excellent examples. Providing a cool escape from midday heat, these vast underground water storage and filtration facilities were built 1,500 years ago, and are a twisting network of low lighting, dripping water, stone pillars and subterranean tunnels.

Back at street level, you can get your bearings in a number of ways. A boat cruise or ferry ride on the Bosphorus is a great way to see some of the main sights of Istanbul, while on the car-free Princes' Island, a short ferry ride from the main city, children can play, ride bicycles and explore nature. In the Golden Horn area, you can ride the cable car to Pierre Loti, which offers amazing views of the entire city. From here, children will love the accessibility of Miniaturk, an open-air park showcasing hundreds of models of Turkey's most famous landmarks, or they can even enjoy a more modern interpretation of

the city at Legoland Discovery Centre. Don't forget to stop and enjoy an ice cream while out and about, too – the Istanbul ice-cream sellers are renowned for the creative and playful tricks they employ to amuse passers-by, and your children will be fascinated.

For any children into planes, boats and railways, Rahmi Koç Museum is dedicated to transport, industry and communications with a focus on interactive discovery. Children are encouraged to climb all over vintage cars, sit in a real plane's cockpit or take a ride in a submarine. Elsewhere, they can also enjoy two aquariums: Sea Life Istanbul, close to Legoland, which houses 25,000 sea creatures and an amazing 83-metre-long underwater ocean tunnel; and Istanbul Aquarium, where kids can admire species from the Black Sea to the Pacific including sharks, giant stingrays, piranhas, and octopuses.

**IN THE PINK**

Right: flamingos are often spotted near Bodrum. Below: the blue lagoon at Ölüdeniz



**BEACH LIFE**

When it's time for a change of pace, the laid-back beaches of the Mediterranean coast provide the perfect place for children to play and parents to unwind. The golden sands and relatively untouched feel of many of the beaches make for a relaxing break, while the country's many blue-flag swimming sites – including Kaputas, Iztuzu and Kleopatra Beach – offer wonderful sea-swimming in the warm, safe waters of the Med. Kas is a favourite for families with smaller children, its picturesque lanes and sandy beaches a perfect way to slow the pace right down; while Ölüdeniz, located ten miles south of Fethiye in a sheltered lagoon, is surrounded by a lush national park on one side and a long white-sand beach on the other. It's also one of the best places for water sports, including paragliding and surfing. Further north is Gümüslük in Bodrum. An archaeological wonder, it will keep kids big and small alike occupied, with a causeway you can cross at low tide, snorkelling in the sparkling clear waters, and a rugged coastline perfect for exploring and jumping off low rocks into the cooling sea.



## HIGH LIFE PROMOTION



### FAMILY BUSINESS

Another great way to explore the Mediterranean region is to get out on to the open sea and discover both the natural world below the waters and wonders of this picturesque coastline. Children love spending a few days enjoying pared-back living on a boat, and many of the mainstream cruise lines have great facilities for youngsters, with fun and educational activities.

Further north, on the sparkling Aegean coast, you'll find more fascinating history to discover. In Ephesus, the best-preserved ancient city in Turkey, the traditional trading port cities of Priene and Miletus are great fun to explore. From here you can catch a boat to Izmir, which has a child-friendly promenade that's excellent for people-watching and horse-and-carriage rides. It is also home to Space Camp, a one-of-a-kind space exhibition centre that focuses on space technology to educate children about vast, unexplored galaxies and the current technologies available for navigating the universe.

Slightly further afield, is the wonderful Izmir Wildlife Park, where more than 2,000 animals roam freely in their natural habitats, from mammals to birds and reptiles, as well as endangered species such as the Asian elephant. On the way, you can stop by Izmir Bird Paradise, home to hundreds of species, where you can spot flamingos and pelicans.

Travelling further inland will also reveal hidden wonders, such as Pamukkale, a Unesco World Heritage site famous for its calcite travertines (or terraces) full of warm, mineral-rich waters; and Hierapolis, which during Roman and Byzantine times was an ancient spa city.

### NATURAL WONDERS

Exploring both the striking geography and impressive ruins of Turkey is a great reminder of the enduring influence of the ancient world and also of the extraordinary power of nature. Nowhere blends these two features more than Cappadocia, a magical fairyland of natural caves and quirky rock formations, created from ancient volcanic activity. Its undulating topography feels almost other-worldly, and children will love exploring its vast network of caves, underground cities, tunnels, rock-cut churches and fairy chimneys. Despite being a Unesco World Heritage Site, most of it is essentially a national park, meaning many areas are not roped off, allowing children to roam freely and explore wherever they want, while many of the hotels are built into the cave structures, making them fun and unusual places to stay. The region also offers a range of activities including pottery-making, biking, horse riding and hot-air ballooning – the latter being one of the most iconic things to do in Cappadocia.

Whether you choose to see Cappadocia from the air or watch the spectacle of its many air balloons floating amidst the sunrise from the ground, this incredible natural playground will be an unforgettable experience for the whole family. ■

[goturkey.com](http://goturkey.com)

### MODERN CLASSICS

From top: Pamukkale's mineral-rich waters flow down travertine terraces; Turkey has around 5,000 miles of coastline

