

FOR THE BOLD AND THE GÜZEL

TURKEY IS GROWING IN POPULARITY WITH SOUTH AFRICAN TRAVELLERS, AND NOT JUST BECAUSE THE RAND CAN HOLD ITS OWN AGAINST THE TURKISH LIRA. THE HISTORICAL COUNTRY OFFERS LYRICAL LANDSCAPES, MEDITERRANEAN BEACHES AND, OF COURSE, THE VIBRANT CITY OF ISTANBUL

BY JAMES BAINBRIDGE

One phrase that goes a long way in Turkey, a little like lekker in South Africa, is *çok güzel* – very beautiful. You can use it to describe your meze or *kebab* (spelt with a 'p' in Turkey), your room in the family-run pension overlooking the olive groves, your tour of Istanbul's Ottoman palaces and mosques, or your dawn hot-air balloon flight over Cappadocia's 'fairy chimney' rock formations. Whatever the context, this golden phrase may well elicit air punches from the hot-blooded, gregarious inhabitants of this nation straddling Europe and the Middle East.

What's really *güzel* for South African travellers is that Turkey offers a relatively affordable slice of the Mediterranean and Aegean. Following an economic boom, the moderately Islamic country experienced a turbulent period of terrorist attacks, carried out by Kurdish insurgents and

WHERE TO STAY

- ▶ **Marmara Guesthouse**, Istanbul
A Sultanahmet pension, offering a sea-facing roof terrace and good value. (From R392 pp pn) marmaraguesthouse.com
- ▶ **Mr Happy's Liman Hotel**, Kuşadası
Meet Hasan, aka Mr Happy, at the 'Harbour' Hotel, with its lobby lounge and roof terrace. (From R244 pp pn) limanhotel.com
- ▶ **Hideaway Hotel**, Kaş
A short stroll from Mediterranean boat trips, with a rooftop bar overlooking the nearby Greek island of Kastellorizo. (From R327 pp pn) hotelhideaway.com





ISIS attackers from neighbouring Syria, and a failed military coup. This troubled time is largely over, even if President Erdoğan remains a divisive figure, but the upshot is that the rand's purchasing power against the Turkish lira has actually improved. Turkish Airlines also offers excellent deals to South Africans, including free Istanbul tours for passengers with long layovers, and Turkish tourist visas are free.

Most Turkish visits begin in the mighty city of Istanbul ('was Constantinople' goes the old ditty), once the capital of the Ottoman and Byzantine Empires. Car-habituated South African eyes may bulge at the London tube map, but if you catch the wrong ferry in Istanbul, you might end up on the wrong continent. This is the world's only city on two continents, divided into the European and Asian sides by the Bosphorus strait, which connects the Marmara and Black Seas. The first stop is Sultanahmet, the Unesco-listed old city, for world-famous sights including the Hagia Sophia, the 1 500-year-old cathedral (now deconsecrated) with its 'floating' dome and glittering mosaics of Byzantine emperors. The two millennia of monuments here also include the Blue Mosque, the Grand Bazaar and sprawling Topkapı Palace, where you can explore the inner chambers of the sultans and their harem. Take a tour or commuter ferry between continents to gaze at the city's minarets and domes over a glass of *çay* (tea), and cross the Golden Horn waterway for a beer and dinner in the 'new' city, 19th-century Beyoğlu.

BEER AND GRUB INDEX

- ▶ **Beer:** South Africa R35; Turkey R35 (TL14)
- ▶ **Burger:** South Africa R90; Turkey R75 (TL30)



From Istanbul, the big question is whether to head down the coast or point your camel across Anatolia to Cappadocia's other-worldly landscape. If transport timetables align, *inshallah* (god willing), you can cover both areas, but the coast may appeal if you're short on time. The northern Aegean, accessible via İzmir, is popular for Ephesus, the well-preserved ruins of the capital of Roman Asia Minor. Stroll down the marble flagstones of Curetes Way, following in the footsteps of Antony and Cleopatra, and imagine the other sightseers are wearing togas to get a feel for this bygone harbour town. The usual base is neighbouring Selçuk, which hasn't forgotten its agricultural roots amid the tourist traffic; storks'

KNOW THIS

▶ **Getting there**
Turkish Airlines (turkishairlines.com) flies direct to Istanbul from Joburg (10 hours), Cape Town and Durban; flights starting at a little over R7 000. The likes of Emirates (emirates.com) and Qatar Airways (qatarairways.com) also offer good deals via the Arabian Peninsula.

▶ **Getting around**
Domestic flights are a practical and affordable way to cover Turkey's vast spaces, with budget carriers including Anadolu Jet (anadolujet.com), Atlasglobal (atlasglob.com), Onur Air (onurair.com), Pegasus Airlines (flypgs.com) and Sun Express (sunexpress.com). Intercity buses are safe, efficient and good value.

▶ **Visas**
One-month multiple-entry tourist visas are free for South Africans, but you must apply before travelling at evisa.gov.tr/en.

▶ **Time zone**
Eastern European Summer Time (GMT/UTC plus three hours).

▶ **Money**
Turkey's currency is the Turkish lira (R10 = ₺4). In touristy areas, euros are widely accepted. ATMs and businesses accepting credit cards are common.

▶ **Language:**
Turkish is the official language, but English is widely spoken.

▶ **Health and safety:**
Crime against tourists is rare, although petty crime and scams do occur in Istanbul. Hospitals, clinics and pharmacies are widespread.



necks atop the Roman aqueduct look down on rustic pensions and farmers' markets. Many South Africans arrive via Kuşadası, which is Turkey's biggest cruise port with its mix of Irish pub-lined Barlar Sokak (Bar Street), old quarter and bazaar. Typical for the multilingual Turks, who have been trading since the Silk Route days, there was an Afrikaans sign on display outside one enterprising leatherwear shop: *Baie mooi baadjie! Afrikaners is plesierig en koop hier!*

From here south, the beach potential is richer than a piece of syrup-drenched baklava, with coastal resorts from Bodrum to Antalya, where Ottoman lanes lead up to the stunning Roman harbour. If you're on a budget, a great tip, apart from booking a package holiday, is to seek out less developed spots such as Patara, Turkey's longest beach, where family-run pensions offer good value. A memorable way to see the Mediterranean

coast is on the Lycian Way (cultureroutesinturkey.com), a waymarked long-distance hiking trail between Fethiye and Antalya. Following the coast from beach towns to hill villages to the Lycian ruins left by this mysterious classical kingdom, you'll discover romantic places such as Kekova's underwater ruins, which were submerged by earthquakes in the 2nd century CE. Equally unbelievable and historic, Cappadocia's wavy valleys of soft tuff rock, formed of layers of compressed volcanic ash, are populated with wacky fairy chimneys and cave churches, carved and painted with frescoes by Byzantine monks. Think that's impressive? Beneath the ground are multilevel cities, where the troglodytes dug down to hide from marauding Persians and Arabs, and today's tourists realise their *Flintstones* fantasies. Now all you need to do is plan your trip – *kolay gelsin* (may it go well). ✈



Clockwise from the top: Turkey is blessed with terrific beaches lapped by the Aegean; the jaw-dropping interior of the Hagia Sophia Mosque; the Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul; lantern shopping at the Grand Bazaar

PHOTOGRAPHY: GALLO/GETTYIMAGES