

Black Sea Coast & the Kaçkar Mountains



Quick. Turn around. There's an entire travel experience over your shoulder that you probably haven't even considered. While you've been planning your Turkish sojourn south to the Med or west to the Aegean, to the north and east the Black Sea (Karadeniz) is equally deserving. Leave the sunbathing and swimming until you head west or south, and expect a more distinctive experience on the country's often overlooked northern coast.

It's only travellers who have been slow to catch on to the appeal of the Black Sea. The craggy and spectacular coastline is scattered with the legacy of the civilisations and empires that have dramatically ebbed and flowed in this historic region. Often bereft of other travellers, castles, churches and monasteries as important as the must-see sights in other parts of Turkey recall the days of the kings of Pontus, the Genoese and the Ottomans. Even earlier times are marked by myths of Amazon warriors and Jason and his Argonauts. The very existence of modern Turkey owes a massive debt to the passionate local support thrown behind Atatürk's republican revolution.

With the region's best views looking north out to sea, the people of the Black Sea really don't think too much about distant Istanbul or Ankara. They're too busy enjoying a relaxed, but cosmopolitan, lifestyle. When you tire of Sinop's laid-back Mediterranean-style vibe, or Trabzon's modern Turkey buzz, head further east to explore the isolated mountain villages and alpine lakes and valleys of the Kaçkar Mountains.

It's often quite surprising what's hidden behind you, isn't it?

HIGHLIGHTS

- Absorb the beauty of centuries-old Byzantine frescoes in the improbable cliff-face setting of the **Sumela Monastery** (p559)
- Walk off tasty home-cooked food amidst the stunning lakes, valleys and peaks of the **Kaçkar Mountains** (p563)
- Take to the back roads to discover **Perşembe** and **Çaka beach** (p550) on the old coastal route from Bolaman to Ordu
- Count the glorious, vertigo-inducing curves on the drop-dead-scenic coastal road from **Amasra** to **Sinop** (p543)
- Fulfil your cosmopolitan urges in the busy streets and bustling big smoke of **Trabzon** (p552)



History

The coast was colonised in the 8th century BC by Milesians and Arcadians, who founded the towns at Sinop, Samsun and Trabzon. Later it became the Kingdom of Pontus. The Pontic king, Mithridates VI Eupator, waged war against the Romans from 88 to 84 BC. He conquered Cappadocia and other Anatolian kingdoms, but had to settle peace based on pre-war borders.

From 74 to 64 BC he was at it again, this time encouraging his son-in-law, Tigranes I of Armenia, to seize Cappadocia from the Romans. The Roman response was to conquer Pontus, forcing Mithridates to flee. He later committed suicide. The Romans left a small kingdom of Pontus based in Trebizond (Trabzon).

The coast was subsequently ruled by Byzantium. Alexius Comnenus, son of Emperor Manuel I, proclaimed himself emperor of Pontus when the Crusaders sacked Constantinople in AD 1204. His descendants ruled until 1461, when Pontus was captured by the Ottomans under Mehmet the Conqueror.

While Alexius remained in Trabzon, Samsun was under Seljuk rule and the Genoese had trading privileges. But when the Ottomans came, the Genoese burned Samsun to the ground and sailed away.

After WWI the region's Ottoman Greek citizens attempted to form a new Pontic state with Allied support. Disarmed by the Allied occupation authorities, Turkish in-

habitants were persecuted by ethnic Greek guerrillas who still had weapons. Under these circumstances, local Turks proved responsive to calls for revolution. Mustafa Kemal (later named Atatürk) escaped the sultan's control in İstanbul and landed at Samsun on 19 May 1919. He soon moved inland to Amasya to organise Turkey's battle for independence.

Climate

The Black Sea coast receives the heaviest rainfall in Turkey with warm, showery summers and mild, rainy and foggy winters. Spring and autumn bring changeable conditions. In the Kaçkar Mountains winters are long, harsh and snowy. Be prepared for unpredictable weather because of the altitude.

BLACK SEA COAST

AMASRA

☎ 0378 / pop 7000

From İstanbul to Amasra is a fair journey, but your first glimpse from the hills above Amasra will make it worthwhile. The first substantial town along the Black Sea coast, Amasra effortlessly assumes the mantle of the region's prettiest port.

It's a popular tourist centre, but is low-key in contrast to the resorts of the Aegean coast. International visitors are still relatively uncommon, and the welcome from

BLACK SEA COAST & THE KAÇKAR MOUNTAINS



locals and Turkish visitors will be warm and unaffected.

The Byzantines held Amasra as part of the Pontic kingdom, but rented the port to the Genoese as a trading station from 1270 until 1460, when Mehmet the Conqueror waltzed in without a fight. Under Ottoman rule, Amasra lost its commercial importance to other Black Sea ports, and today it's a laid-back spot to relax, dine on excellent seafood, and plan your impending journey along the Black Sea coast.

Orientation

Entering Amasra, on your left is the museum in an old stone building. Most buses stop at an intersection near the post office (PTT). Follow the sign to 'Şehir Merkezi' (north) for the Küçük Liman (Small Harbour) with restaurants and pensions. Walk straight (east) to hit the sandy strip of the Büyük Liman (Large Harbour).

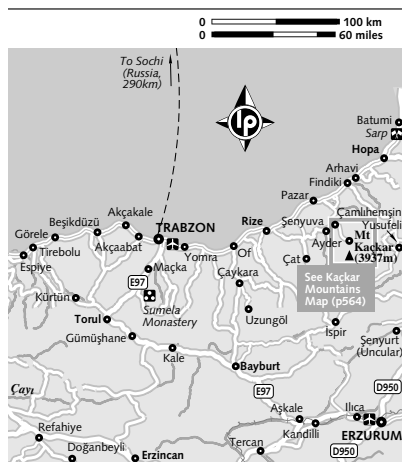
The entrance to the citadel lurks around souvenir shops in the Küçük Liman.

Information

The **tourist office** adjacent to the Can Internet Café was closed at the time of writing. A cluster of **ATMs** is on Küçük Liman.

Amasra Turizm (☎ 315 1978; www.amasraturizm.com; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 13) Hotel bookings, car hire and tourist services.

Can Internet Café (Atatürk Kültür Parkı; per hr TL1.50; ☎ 9am-10pm) Near the statue of Atatürk.



Sights & Activities

North of the two harbours, three massive gateways lead to Amasra's **kale** (citadel). It encompasses the promontory fortified by the Byzantines when the port was known as Sesamos Amastris.

Inside the citadel is now mainly residential. The original walls survive and contain relics including the 15th-century **Eski Chapel** (Old Chapel).

The excellent **Amasra Museum** (Amasra Müzesi; ☎ 315 1006; Dereoğlu Sokak 4; admission TL3; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun), overlooking Küçük Liman, contains Roman, Byzantine and Hellenistic finds showcasing Amasra's many-mastered history.

Amasra's location is best admired from the sea. Operators in Büyük Liman offer **boat trips** around the harbour and along the coastline. Expect to pay about TL5 for a short tour (45 minutes) and TL30 for a longer tour (six hours) including swimming stops and lunch on a nearby island.

Sleeping

Rates in Amasra can rise by 10% to 40% on busy summer weekends. Prices quoted here are for midweek.

Amasra is a good spot for *ev pansiyon* (pensions in private homes). Look for 'Pansiyon' notices along the seafront and in the *kale*.

All *pansiyon*s close from November to April, and most hotels will only be open on weekends during these months.

Balkaya Pansiyon (☎ 315 1434; İskele Caddesi 35; s/d TL30/60) The cheapest formal pension in town, offering small, basic rooms on a side street between the harbours.

Çarşı Pansiyon Evi (☎ 315 1146; carsipansiyon@amasra.net; Zeki Çakan Caddesi 23; s/d TL30/60) In the market near the castle entrance, this new place has private patios decorated with comfy cushions. The wood-trimmed rooms somehow manage to be modern and rustic at the same time.

Pansiyon Evi (☎ 661 6337; Küçük Liman 33a; s/d TL30/60) Just inside the castle gates, this rambling three-storey wooden house has tidy rooms and breakfast on a breezy terrace overlooking Küçük Liman. Amasra's postage-stamp-sized pub district is nearby.

Şahil Otel (☎ 315 2211; Turgut Işık Caddesi 82; s/d TL35/70) Opposite the sailing club on the Büyük Liman, this compact but modern option has

sea-facing balconies. Good waterfront eating and drinking is just a stroll away.

Kuşna Pansiyon (☎ 315 1033; kusnapansiyon@mynet.com; Kurşuna Sokak 36; s/d TL40/80; 📶) Bright and modern rooms overlooking a verdant (read: 'pleasantly overgrown') garden feature at this castle *ev pansiyon* looking out onto a private, rocky cove.

Timur Otel (☎ 315 2589; www.oteltimur.com; Çekiciler Caddesi 27; s/d/tr TL45/80/110) Good English is spoken at this central option with spotless, pretty-in-pink rooms overlooking a quiet square. Double-glazing on the windows ensures a good night's kip.

Büyük Liman Otel (☎ 315 3900; Turgut Işık Caddesi; s/d TL55/90; 📶) In an excellent location on the harbour road, look forward to spacious rooms, some with beachfront balconies. A lick of paint wouldn't go amiss though.

Hotel Türkili (☎ 315 3750; www.turkili.com.tr; Özdemirhan Sokak 6; s/d TL60/100; 📶) The wrought-iron balconies and pink facade add a European tinge to this Amasra favourite. Wi-fi, satellite TV and good English skills at reception add up to one of Amasra's best. Türkili's 5th-floor restaurant offers views over both harbours.

İşikaltın Otel (☎ 315 3951; www.isikaltinotel.com, in Turkish; Çamlık Sokak; s/d TL60/100; 📶) An imposing structure overlooking Küçük Liman, the İşikaltın has slightly characterless, but very comfortable rooms, with the added attraction of an excellent fish restaurant. We just wish the folk in reception would smile.

Eating

Amasra has licensed seafront restaurants serving *canlı balık* (fresh fish) by the portion. Cheaper seafood stalls huddle at the castle end of Büyük Liman.

Hamam Café (☎ 378 3878; Tarihi Saçır Osmanlar Hamamı; mains TL2-10) In an old hamam (bath-house), this reader-recommended spot has an easygoing ambience perfect for sipping tea, eating pizza or challenging the locals to a game of backgammon.

Amasra Sofrası (☎ 315 2483; G Mithat Ceylan Caddesi; mains TL4-10) On a quiet square midway between the two harbours, this is Amasra's prime grill house, with plenty of chicken dishes and a pretty garden.

Karadeniz Aile Pide Salonu (☎ 315 1543; Mustafa Cengiz Caddesi 9; mains TL5-8) Also known as Hayder's Place, this streetside spot just off Küçük Liman does great pide (Turkish-style

pizza). Try the 'Amasra Special' (TL6) with a dash of zingy chilli.

Çesmi Cihan Restaurant (☎ 315 1062; Büyük Liman; mains TL10-20; 📶 11am-11pm) This is the locals' pick for a splurge, with top-of-the-line harbour views, cold beer and three floors of seafood-loving diners. *Levrek* (bass) and *istavrit* (mackerel) are regulars on the menu, and the excellent salads will convert the staunchest of carnivores.

Mustafa Amca'nın Yeri (☎ 315 2606; Küçük Liman Caddesi 8; mains TL10-20; 📶 11am-11pm) This sea-shell-clad fish restaurant is popular both with tour groups and locals. They were building a huge new deck when we were there so they must be doing something right. Go early to grab a waterfront table for a chilled twilight beer.

Drinking

Ağlayan Ağa Çay Bahçesi (Nöbethane Sokak; 📶 8am-8pm) Head up through the *kale* to this cliff-top kiosk with views of squawking seagulls a few hundred metres offshore. Signs point the way.

Atafirin (nr Cumhuriyet Caddesi & Mustafa Cengiz Caddesi; 📶 8am-10pm) Amasra's bright young things crowd this corner spot for coffee, smoothies and a tempting array of sweet-tooth nibbles.

Han Kır Çay Bahçesi (Küçük Liman; 📶 8am-10pm) Sip away and see how many different plant species you can spy in this leafy tea garden.

Na Bar (Büyük Liman 50b) Tucked between beachfront apartments on Büyük Liman, this friendly pub with rustic decor is less rowdy than Amasra's other bars.

Han Bar (Küçük Liman Caddesi 17) The most popular of Amasra's small cluster of pubs, Han Bar is sandwiched between houses opposite the castle walls. There's usually *canlı musik* (live music) at night.

Everyone needs good neighbours and the friendly **Kupu Bar** (complete with an Astroturf deck) is right next door.

Getting There & Away

If you're travelling east from Amasra, get an early start. Dolmuş (minibuses) become increasingly scarce later in the day.

Intercity bus companies don't operate to Amasra. Instead, minibuses to Bartın (TL2, 30 minutes) leave every 40 minutes from near the PTT. From Bartın there are buses to Safranbolu (TL12, two hours), Ankara (TL30, five hours) and İstanbul (TL45, seven hours).

AMASRA TO SİNOP

Winding sinuously around rugged hills hugging the Black Sea, the road from Amasra east to Sinop (312km) is wonderfully scenic, and has echoes of California's Hwy 1 or New Zealand's West Coast. Expect minimal traffic and stunning views at every turn. Expect narrow roads and slow going, though (average speed is 40km/h to 50km/h, taking seven or eight hours to Sinop), with the road surface often broken and the occasional *heyelan* (landslide). By public transport, you'll need to use local services between the settlements along the way. Get an early start, and if you're lucky you might nab one of the daily bus services from İstanbul.

A few villages have camping grounds, and with your own wheels you can stop where and when the vista is most appealing. From west to east, have a swim at **Bozköy beach**, west of **Çakraz**, or visit the boat-builders in **Kurucaşile**, 45km east of Amasra. Both towns have modest hotels and pensions.

Consider also the picturesque two-beach village of **Kapisuyu**, or the tiny harbour at **Gideros**, the perfectly idyllic cove of your dreams. A couple of fish restaurants keep the dream alive.

About 63km east of Amasra, the road descends to a sand-and-pebble beach stretching several kilometres to the aptly named **Kumluca** (Sandy). The beach continues 8km eastward to **Cide**, a small town where many *dolmuş* services terminate. The **Yalı Otel** (☎ 0366-866 2087; www.yaliozel.com; Liman Yolu; s/d TL25/50) is a good overnight option with an on-site restaurant.

Leaving Cide, there's a panoramic viewpoint by the flagpole above town. Around 12km on is **Kuscu Köyü**, a small village with access to the **Aydos Canyon**, a steep river ravine.

Doğanyurt, 31km before İnebolu, is yet another pleasant harbour town, while further east from İnebolu, **Abana** has a decent beach.

Over halfway to Sinop, **İnebolu** is another handy stopping point, especially as onward transport by late afternoon may be hard to find. The **Yakamoz Tatil Köyü** (☎ 0366-811 3100; www.yakamoztatilkoyu.com, in Turkish; İsmetpaşa Caddesi; bungalow s/d TL45/65, s/d/tr TL55/80/120; ♿ ♿) is a beachside resort 800m west of the centre with a restaurant (mains TL6 to TL15), bar and café. In the town centre are old Ottoman houses, and a restored mansion where Atatürk stayed in 1925.

About 41km east of İnebolu, near **Çatalzeytin**, is a long pebble beach surrounded by beautiful scenery. At **Ayanık** the road divides, with the left (northern) fork offering the more scenic route to Sinop, about 2½ hours from İnebolu.

SİNOP

☎ 0368 / pop 101,000

Wrapped around a rocky promontory, Sinop is the only southern facing town along the Black Sea. Maybe that's why the town feels more Akdeniz (Mediterranean) than Karadeniz (Black Sea). Sinop has been a trading port for over a thousand years, and still retains a bustling, cosmopolitan air. The town's heritage is also reflected in the many shops selling model ships. Today's visitors are more likely to be holidaying Turks, and for international travellers Sinop is a welcoming Black Sea base tinged with the ambience of the Med.

History

Colonised from Miletus in the 8th century BC, Sinop's trade grew, and successive rulers – including the Pontic kings (who made it their capital), Romans and Byzantines – turned it into a busy trading centre.

The Seljuks used Sinop as a port after taking it in 1214, but the Ottomans preferred to develop Samsun, which had better land communications.

On 30 November 1853, a Russian armada attacked Sinop without any warning, overwhelming the local garrison and inflicting great loss of life. The battle hastened the beginning of the Crimean War, in which the Ottomans allied with the British and French to fight Russian ambitions in the Near East.

Orientation

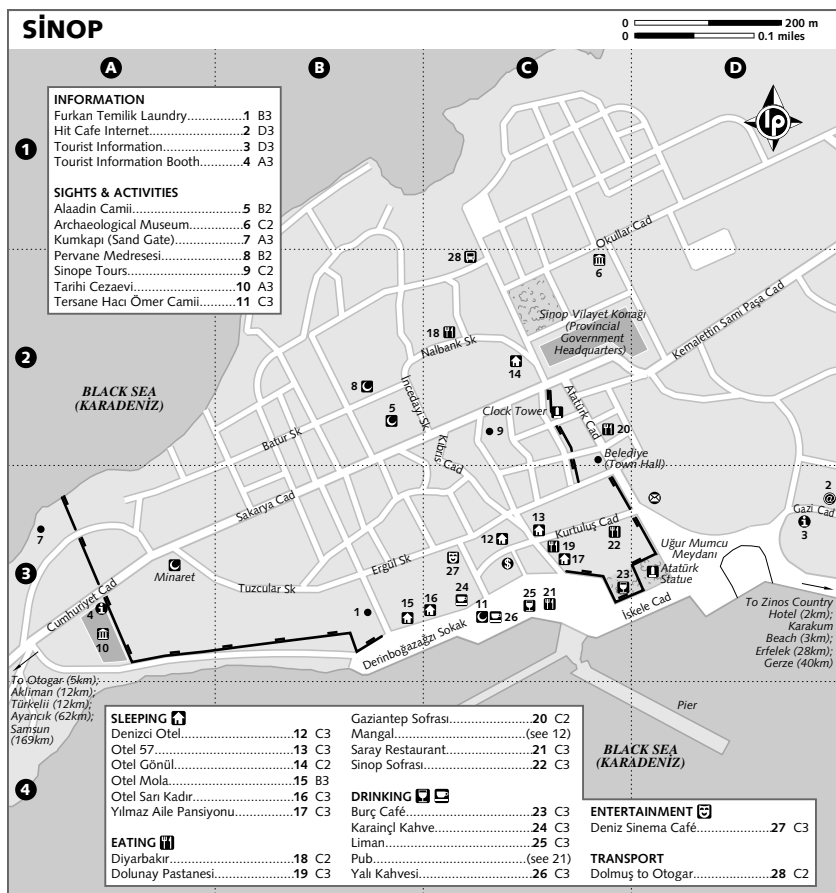
Sinop is at the narrow point of the peninsula, with the road continuing east beyond the town to beaches and land's end. From the western entrance of the fortified walls, the main street, Sakarya Caddesi, cuts east through the centre 800m to the Sinop *vilayet konağı* (provincial government headquarters). Sinop's new otogar (bus station) is 5km northwest of town on the main road to Kastamonu.

Information

Furkan Temiik Laundry (Derinboğazacı Sokak 5; per kg TL3.50; ☎ 8.30am-6pm)

Hit Café Internet (Gazi Caddesi; per hr TL1.25;

☎ 10am-midnight)



Tourist information (☎ 261 5298; Gazi Caddesi; ☎ 8.30am-5pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep) Helpful with English-speaking staff.

Tourist information booth Near the Tarihi Cezaevi (right)

Sights & Activities

Sinop's prime attraction are the relatively well-preserved **fortifications**. Open to attack from the sea, Sinop has been fortified since 2000 BC, but the existing walls are developments of those originally erected in 72 BC by Pontic king Mithridates VI. At one time the walls, some 3m thick, were more than 2km long, with seven gates, and towers 25m high. Walk along the ramparts for sea views.

On the northern side is an ancient bastion called the **Kumkapi** (Sand Gate). On the south-

ern side is the **Tarihi Cezaevi** (Old Jail; admission TL3; ☎ 9am-6pm), a hulking former prison. Inside is a modest selection of craft shops.

Sinop's excellent **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 261 1975; Okullar Caddesi; admission TL3; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun) has a collection of poignant Roman stele, Byzantine icons, and an Ottoman tomb in the cool and shady garden. We just wish they'd fix the annoying on again/off again automatic lighting.

In the town centre on Sakarya Caddesi stands the **Alaadin Camii** (1267), also called the Ulu Cami, a mosque set in an expansive walled courtyard. It was constructed for Muinettin Süleyman Pervane, a powerful Seljuk grand vizier. The mosque has been repaired many times; its marble *mihrab* (the niche indicating

THE SİNOP RUMOUR FACTORY *Brett Atkinson*

'So, do you work for the CIA?' It was a question I'd never heard before, but the conversation was about to get even more interesting. My new drinking buddy began to tell me fantastic stories of a lost city beneath the waters around Sinop. Apparently it was immersed in water when the Mediterranean broke through a narrow land bridge almost 8000 years ago to turn a small lake into what we know now as the Black Sea. And on the hill above our simple cliff-top bar at Sinop's Karakum beach, Noah's Ark was apparently buried.

Other rumours circulating in Sinop are more contemporary and tangible. In 2006 the region was earmarked as the site of one of Turkey's first nuclear power plants. Resistance in normally reticent Turkey has been well organised and robust (see www.sinopbizim.org), but in mid-2008, Sinop was reconfirmed as the site of Turkey's second nuclear plant, with the first confirmed near the southern city of Mersin.

And do I work for the CIA? Well, according to other rumours I've heard, I wouldn't be the first guidebook writer to lead such a double life.

the direction of Mecca) and *mimber* (pulpit) were added by the local Candaroğlu emir. At the time of research, further careful restoration was being undertaken.

Adjacent is the **Pervane Medresesi** (Pervane Seminary), built by Süleyman Pervane in 1262 to commemorate the second conquest of Sinop. It's now full of shops selling crafts and local products.

Near the harbour is the **Tersane Hacı Ömer Camii** (1903) with the poignant Şehitler Çeşmesi (Martyrs' Fountain), built in memory of the Turkish soldiers who died in the surprise Russian attack of 1853. The fountain was built using the money recovered from the soldiers' pockets.

Sinope Tours (☎ 261 7900; www.sinopetours.com; Kibris Caddesi 3) runs daily city and local tours. Ask here if the catamaran is running to Yalta in Ukraine.

Sleeping

Yılmaz Aile Pansiyonu (☎ 261 5752; Tersane Çarşısı 11; s/d/tr TL20/40/60) Great value, these plain but neat rooms have TV and individual gas showers. Homely touches abound at this friendly spot near the harbour. A few rooms have sea views.

Otel 57 (☎ 261 5462; www.otel57.com; Kurtuluş Caddesi 29; s/d TL35/50; 📶 📺) Spic-and-span leather chairs in reception give way to comfortable rooms with bright duvets and crisp wooden floors. The whole place has recently been refurbished for even better value.

Otel Sarı Kadir (☎ 260 1544; Derinboğazacı Sokak 22; s/d TL35/50) Plain but spacious rooms with TV, sofa and fridge make this waterfront establishment a good-value choice. There are sea

views from the balconies, and a tea garden right opposite.

Otel Gönül (☎ 261 1829; www.sinopotelgonul.com; Meydankapı Mahallesi 11; s/d/tr TL40/60/70; 📶 📺) The promise of a big screen telly in reception dissolves in the compact but kitschy rooms upstairs. A reliable backup, but the in-town location negates sea views.

Otel Mola (☎ 261 1814; Derinboğazacı Sokak 34; www.sinopmolaotel.com.tr; s/d/tr TL50/80/100; 📶 📺) A lovely garden and sea views give this new spot near the harbour high marks. Rooms are comfortable, but the carpet should come with a volume knob.

Denizci Otel (☎ 260 5934; Kurtuluş Caddesi 13; www.denizciotel.com; s/d/tr TL50/80/110; 📶 📺) The flashiest spot in town with a maritime-themed restaurant and spacious rooms with heritage decor. The friendly staff gamely summons up every word of English they know.

Zinos Country Hotel (☎ 260 5600; Enver Bahadır Yolu 75; www.zinoshotel.com; s/d TL85/145; 📶 📺) Around 2km from town en route to Karakum beach, the Zinos is hardly in the country. But despite the geographical confusion, this is a splurge-worthy spot with romantic Ottoman-styled rooms with rug-trimmed wooden floors and sea views. Across the road, there's a hilltop bar, and a trail leads to a private swimming platform.

Eating

Sinop's waterfront is lined with licensed open-air restaurants.

Dolunay Pastanesi (☎ 261 8688; Kurtuluş Caddesi 14; desserts from TL2) This modern take on the pastry shop serves up ice-cream and baklava. Both are perfect for a stroll along the nearby harbour.

Mangal (Kurtuluş Caddesi 15; crêpes TL2-4) Delicious *gözleme* (savoury crêpes) are served up by an older lady with just maybe Sinop's biggest smile.

Diyarbakır (☎ 260 0833; Nalbank Sokak 1; mains TL3-5) Diyarbakır may be slightly rough and ready, but this popular spot provides top-notch versions of kebaps from Adana to Bursa. The *paket servis* (takeout) option is good for bus journeys.

Sinop Sofrası (☎ 260 0915; Kurtuluş Caddesi 28; mains TL3-5) Hugely popular, this humble spot has a wide array of goodies including stuffed eggplant, *köfte* (meatballs) and rice. Pide and kebaps also fuel loyal locals.

Gaziantep Sofrası (Atatürk Caddesi; mains TL4-6) Families and dating couples crowd the upstairs salon for foot-long eggplant kebaps and excellent *lahmacun* (Arabic-style pizza). It's a welcoming place that's good for women travellers.

Saray Restaurant (☎ 261 1729; İskele Caddesi 18; fish mains TL10-15; ☎ 11am-11pm) Excellent salads and continuously sipped rakı (aniseed brandy) make this the preferred spot for local fans of caught-this-morning seafood. Grab a spot on the floating pontoon and begin your meal with Saray's excellent mezes.

Drinking & Entertainment

Yalı Kahvesi (Derinboğazazgi Sokak 14; ☎ 8am-10pm) Harbourside tables and shady umbrellas combine at this popular tea garden.

Burç Café (☎ 260 0420; Sinop Kalesi, Tersane Caddesi) In the tower of the fortifications, this atmospheric spot attracts a young crowd for live music, ocean views and cold beer. Bring a sweatshirt as it can get chilly.

Liman (İskele Caddesi 20; ☎ noon-10pm) Bring your backgammon A-game to this harbourside bar. If you're a novice maybe just settle for a sunset beer.

Pub (İskele Caddesi 19; ☎ noon-10pm) How about a cold 0.7L beer outside beside colourful fish-

ing boats? Sometimes life's simple pleasures are the best.

Karainç Kahve (Derinboğazazgi Sokak 9; coffee TL3-5; ☎ noon-10pm) This coolly minimalist café has a wide range of tea and coffee. There are muffins and cookies galore, and laptop travellers can hop aboard the wi-fi network.

Deniz Sinema Café (☎ 261 0643; Ergül Sokak; ☎ 2pm-midnight) Coffee, tea and beers feature at this movie-themed café with an arty, student vibe. The attached cinema shows mainly Turkish flicks but you might get lucky. It's down a lane near Karainç Kahve.

Getting There & Away

The table, below, lists daily services from Sinop. There are no direct services to Amasra, 312km to the west. Take point-to-point minibuses or change at İnebolu or Cide. Catch a *dolmuş* (TL1.50) to Sinop's otogar from the corner northwest of Sinop's *vilayet konağı*.

In recent years a catamaran service ran from Sinop to Yalta in Ukraine, but it was suspended at the time of writing. Ask at Sinope Tours (p545) for the latest information.

AROUND SİNOP

Consult Sinop's tourist office or Sinope Tours (p545) for suggestions for local tours. The most common excursions are to **Erfelek**, famed for its 28 waterfalls, the historic fishing town of **Gerze**, and the area around **Yançık**. Walking and canoeing are popular pastimes for the more energetic visitor.

To swim in the Black Sea, the black-sand **Karakum beach** (admission TL1) with a restaurant and camping site, is 3km east of Sinop harbour.

SAMSUN

☎ 0362 / pop 504,000

Sprawling Samsun is the Black Sea's biggest port. Few travellers stop for more than a

SERVICES FROM SİNOP'S OTOGAR

Destination	Fare (TL)	Duration (hr)	Distance (km)	Frequency (per day)
Ankara	40	9	443	3
İnebolu	20	3	156	1 at 8am
İstanbul	50	10½	700	5
Karabük (for Safranbolu)	30	6	340	5
Samsun	20	3½	168	roughly hourly
Trabzon	50	9	533	1 at 8pm

ARE WE THERE YET?

For multiple editions of the Turkey guidebook, we've commented on the road works blighting the Black Sea coast east from Samsun. Across 20 years bulldozers and road-compactors have been rumbling away to build the Black Sea Coastal Highway. Since construction began, Turkey has experienced 14 different governments, and at the time of writing, the four- to six-lane highway linking Samsun to the Turkey–Georgia border at Sarp was *still* being completed, despite an 'official' opening date almost 18 months earlier.

The road provides an essential trade link for Turkey with the world to the east, especially to Central Asia and former Soviet states like Russia and Georgia. And while Turkey's potential membership of the EU is endlessly discussed, the country's traditional cultural and linguistic links are already forging a trade bonanza to the east.

The economic benefits of the road are undeniable, but a significant cost has been a cutting off of many Black Sea settlements from the sea, and a cavalcade of goods-laden TIR trucks rushing through coastal towns like Ünye and Ordu. Environmentalists also contend that many ecologically valuable areas were destroyed during the road's construction.

The Black Sea Coastal Highway doesn't follow the coast all the way though, and a sleepy stretch of the old coast road from Bolaman to Ordu (p550) still affords a glimpse into a quieter yesteryear.

change of bus. Even the enterprising Genoese only paused long enough to burn the city to the ground in the 15th century. With accommodation and eateries handily crammed around the centre, it's a convenient stop on your journey east or west. Samsun also marks the beginning of the Black Sea Coastal Highway (see boxed text, above).

Orientation & Information

The city centre is Cumhuriyet Meydanı (Republic Sq), inland, and just west of Atatürk Park, which lies on the coastal highway. The Samsun *valiliği* (provincial government headquarters) is slightly to the north. Cumhuriyet Caddesi runs along the south side of the park.

The **tourist office** (☎ 431 1228; Atatürk Bulvarı 179; ☎ 8am–noon & 1–5pm daily Jun–Aug, Mon–Fri Sep–May), across the coastal road from Cumhuriyet Meydanı, has decent maps and brochures.

The train station is 550m southeast of Atatürk Park on the coastal road, Atatürk Bulvarı. Samsun's new otogar is 3km inland. Bus companies run *servis* (shuttle) buses from Cumhuriyet Meydanı to the otogar. There are also frequent dolmuşes (TL1.50) from the otogar to Cumhuriyet Meydanı, and left luggage facilities at the otogar if you've got time to kill between buses.

Sights

With an hour to spare it's worth visiting the **Archaeology & Ethnography Museum** (Arkeoloji ve

Etnoğrafya Müzesi; ☎ 431 6828; Fuar Caddesi; admission TL3; ☎ 8.30am–noon & 1–5pm Tue–Sun), west of the big pink Samsun *valiliği* building. Most striking is a huge Romano–Byzantine mosaic depicting Thetis, Achilles and the Four Seasons, found nearby at Karasamsun (Amisoss). Other highlights include the elegant gold jewellery thought to date from the time of the legendary Mithridates (VI Eupator, 120 to 130 BC), and a scary display on ancient skull surgery.

Adjacent is the **Atatürk Museum** (Atatürk Müzesi; Fuar Caddesi; admission TL2; ☎ 8.30am–1pm & 2–5pm), commemorating the start of the War of Independence here on 19 May 1919.

Sleeping & Eating

Explore the clothing bazaar location for budget accommodation.

Hotel Necmi (☎ 432 7164; www.otelnecmi.com.tr; Bedestan Sokak 6; s/d/tr without bathroom TL40/55/70) Downstairs is a pot plant-filled lounge, while the rooms upstairs are compact with mushroom-coloured carpet and shared bathrooms.

Samsun Park Otel (☎ 435 0095; www.samsunparkotel.com; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 38; s/d/tr TL60/70/100; ☎ ☎) A hieroglyphic lift whisks you to compact but comfortable rooms just south of the city centre. The attached restaurant and several nearby patisseries are all good.

Vidimli Oteli (☎ 431 6050; Kazımpaşa Caddesi 4; s/d TL70/140; ☎ ☎) The Vidimli plays the business traveller card a little too strongly, with the

comfortable rooms veering towards blandness. Plus points are the tiled bathrooms and an expense-account-friendly bar/restaurant.

Hotel Amisos (☎ 435 9400; www.hotelamisos.com; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 18; s/d TL150/200; 🚻 📺) Samsun's flashiest address offers rooms with a classic combination of red and gold decor, minibars and satellite TV. Cheap eateries nearby will counterbalance the room prices.

Sıla Restaurant (☎ 432 9515; Vilayet Karşısı 36; mains TL4-10) All the usual kebab and pide favourites await at this reliable central eatery.

Samsun Balık Restaurant (☎ 435 7550; Kazımpaşa Caddesi 20; mains TL8-15; 🕒 11am-10pm) Samsun's number-one fish eatery is in a quaint brick house. A glistening array of piscine beauties awaits your choice, and upstairs is a flower-trimmed dining room.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Turkish Airlines (☎ 444 0849; www.thy.com; Havaalani Samsun) flies direct to İstanbul's Havaalani Samsun (Samsun Airport) up to five times daily. There are also four flights per week to Ankara. **Onur Air** (☎ 844 8808; www.onurair.com; Havaalani Samsun) has two flights per day to İstanbul. **Pegasus Airlines** (☎ 444 0737; www.flypgs.com) flies to İzmir on Mondays and Saturdays. **SunExpress** (☎ 444 0797; www.sunexpress.com.tr) and **Izair** (☎ 444 4499; www.izair.com) link Samsun and İzmir during summer.

BUS

Most major bus companies have offices at the Cumhuriyet Meydanı end of Cumhuriyet Caddesi. Services to major destinations are listed in the table (below).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Samsun has car-rental agencies around Lise Caddesi including **Avis** (☎ 231 6750; Ümraniye Sokak

2) and **Eleni** (☎ 230 0091; Ümraniye Sokak 6). Head southeast for 700m from Atatürk Park along Cumhuriyet Caddesi to Lise Caddesi. After 150m veer right into Ümraniye Sokak.

TRAIN

Two daily trains run from Samsun **station** (☎ 233 5002) to Sivas (TL15.75, 8½ hours) and Amasya (TL5.25, three hours).

ÜNYE

☎ 0452 / pop 72,800

Today's Ünye is popular with holidaying Turks, but this bustling spot 95km east of Samsun also has one of the longest settlement histories in Anatolia. There is evidence of civilisation during the Palaeolithic period, and Ünye was an important port at the junction of the Silk Rd and the coastal highway during the Ottoman period. Former residents include the 14th-century Turkish mystical poet Yunus Emre, and St Nicholas before his life morphed into the legend of Santa Claus. Today it's a modern city combining a coastal promenade and a labyrinth of well-kept winding streets and lanes.

The friendly **tourist office** (☎ 323 2569; 🕒 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri) is in the pink government Kaymakamlığı building on the main square.

Sights & Activities

About 7km inland stands **Ünye Castle**, a ruined fortress founded by the Pontics and rebuilt by the Byzantines, with an ancient tomb cut into the rock face below. Catch a minibus heading to Kaleköy or Akkuş (TL1) from the Niksar road, and ask to be dropped off at the road to the castle. It's a further half-hour trek to the top.

Another excursion is the **Tozkoparan Kay Mezarı** (Tozkoparan Rock Tomb), off the

SERVICES FROM SAMSUN'S OTOGAR

Destination	Fare (TL)	Duration (hr)	Distance (km)	Frequency (per day)
Amasya	10	2½	130	frequent
Ankara	49	7	420	frequent
Artvin	40	8	577	4
Giresun	20	3½	220	5
İstanbul	79	11	750	several
Kayseri	45	9	530	a few
Sinop	20	3	168	several
Trabzon	30	6	355	several
Ünye	8	1½	95	every 30 minutes

THE AMAZIN' RACE

The Samsun-Ünye region is often associated with the Amazons, one of the most enduring Greek myths. This race of warrior women, famed for cutting off one breast to aid their archery skills, were said to have ruled the coast in pre-Pontic times. Homer, Herodotus and Amasya's own Strabo all relate tales of strapping female soldiers. Reputedly their reproductive habits involved annual coitus with a neighbouring tribe, or 'breeding colonies' of captive male sex slaves. Some early biographers even claim Alexander the Great fathered a child with the Amazonian queen Thalestris.

Historically speaking, there is little evidence to support any Amazonian presence in the Black Sea area around the purported 1200 BC timeframe. One theory is that the myth evolved from the role of high priestesses in mother-goddess cults. Other historians believe that it arose from travellers encountering Anatolian tribes with matriarchal systems or greater gender equality, both contrary to their own ingrained societal values.

This enduring classical myth continued to capture public imagination across following centuries, and eventually provided the name for the world's largest river.

Trabzon road 5km from the centre. Any east-bound minibus can drop you by the cement factory at the turn for the cave.

Back in town, just east of the square is the **Ali-Namık Soysal Eski Hamam**. It was once a church, but now it's open for bathing to men from early morning to noon and all day Sunday, and for women from noon until 4pm.

Sleeping

Otel Çınar (☎ 323 1148; Hükümet Caddesi 18; s/d TL15/30) This central budget option has shared bathrooms and no breakfast is provided. From the tourist office turn left and head one block inland.

Otel Lider (☎ 324 9250; Hükümet Caddesi 36; s/d TL20/40) Centrally located, the Lider has a rooftop terrace. No breakfast is served but there's a good kebap place nearby that can rustle up *kahvaltı* (breakfast).

Hotel Grand Kuşçalı (☎ 324 5200; Devlet Sahilyolu Şehir Merkezi 42; s/d/tr TL70/80/120; 🚻 📺) That's 'grand' with a small 'g', but the 1970s-tinged rooms are still the most comfortable in town with minibars and satellite TV. The sea-view restaurant and sauna/hamam complex keep the tour groups happy.

Ünye has an array of camping grounds and a handful of beach pensions, mostly spread out along the Samsun road west of town. **Cafe Gülen Plaj Camping** (☎ 324 7368; Devlet Sahil Yolu; camp sites per 2 people TL20, bungalows TL60) has an excellent setting and cute wooden bungalows. The adjacent **Uzunkum Restaurant Plaj & Camping** (☎ 323 2022; Devlet Sahil Yolu; camp sites per 2 people TL20) is another welcoming spot graced

with a beachfront setting, loads of shade and a good restaurant. Green-and-white minibuses regularly ply the coastal route between these places and the centre of town from early in the morning until around 11pm.

Eating

Café Vanilya (☎ 324 4106; Cumhuriyet Meydanı 3; snacks TL2-5; ☎ 10am-8pm) Set in a restored villa-style townhouse on the southwest edge of the main square, the Vanilya is a chic but unpretentious terrace café serving Ünye's would-be bright young things. Backgammon and Turkish pop videos provide a mix of old and new.

Evim (☎ 324 3341; Hacı Emin Caddesi; mains TL2-6) Just off the main square, and dishing up *baklava*, *börek* (filled pastries) and *mantı* (Turkish ravioli) to regulars. Look for the faded *gözleme* sign.

Çakırtepe (☎ 323 2568; Çakırtepe; mains TL5-10; ☎ 11am-10pm) Atop the hill west of town, this picnic site and café is a local favourite for long summer lunches. Tuck into excellent *pide* or *güveç* (stew in a clay pot). Minibuses leave from the west side of Cumhuriyet Meydanı and pass close to the restaurant.

Çamlık Restaurant (☎ 323 1175; Çamlık İçi; mains TL5-12; ☎ 11am-10pm) This picnic place and recreation area also includes an excellent grill restaurant which cascades over several levels to the ocean. The fish and the *köfte* are excellent. Kick off with a cold beer and Çamlık's mezes.

Yunus Emre Çay Bahçesi (☎ 323 3068; Yunus Emre Parkı; mains TL5-12) This well-frequented tea garden beside the pier serves substantial *pidés* and stews as well as the usual drinks.

DETOUR: THE OLD COAST ROAD

Around 25km east of Ünye just after the town of Bolaman, the Black Sea Coastal Highway veers inland and doesn't touch the coast again until just before Ordu. It's a spectacular stretch traversing Turkey's longest road tunnel (3.28km), but the diversion inland has created a lovely alternative route on the old coast road.

A winding few kilometres east from Bolaman is rugged **Cape Yason**, where a tiny medieval chapel marks the spot where sailors used to pray at a temple remembering Jason and his Argonauts. Further east is the surprising **Çaka beach**, a 400m strip of white sand regarded as the Black Sea's best beach. A grill restaurant and beer garden makes it easy to enjoy.

Further on, 15km west of Ordu, **Perşembe** is a fishing port framed by two lighthouses. The rooms at the two-star **Dede Evi** (☎ 0452-517 3802; Atatürk Bulvarı; s/d TL35/70; ♿) have parquet floors and sea views. Later at night locals fish from the slender pier and fish restaurants prepare the day's catch.

This meandering detour is best achieved with your own transport, but there is also relatively frequent dolmuş traffic to Perşembe from Fatsa to the west and Ordu to the east.

Sofra (☎ 323 4083; Belediye Caddesi 25; mains TL6-12) Sofra is a square stone house with pide, kebabs and Ottoman dishes. It's a tad pricey, but the faded elegance makes it worth the premium. It's a couple of blocks east of the main square.

Getting There & Away

Bus companies have offices on the coastal road. Minibuses and midibuses travel to Samsun (TL8, 1½ hours) and Ordu (TL8, 1¼ hours).

ORDU

☎ 0452 / pop 124,000

Ordu is 80km east of Ünye, with a well-kept centre around a palm tree-lined seafront boulevard. The city sprawls in both directions, but winding narrow lanes give central Ordu a village-like ambience.

At the time of writing the tourist office was closed due to local funding issues. Ask at the Karlibel Atlıhan Hotel if it's reopened. The hotel can supply a good map in the interim.

Check your email at **Ordu Net** (Fıdangör Sokak; per hr TL1.25; ☒ 10am-midnight).

Sights

The interesting **Pasha's Palace & Ethnography Museum** (Paşaoğlu Konağı ve Etnoğrafya Müzesi; Taşocak Caddesi; admission TL3; ☒ 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm Tue-Sun) occupies a late-19th-century house 500m uphill from Cumhuriyet Meydanı. Signs reading 'Müze – Museum' direct you here past a handicrafts bazaar. The re-created rooms on the 1st floor are telling reminders that upper-class Ottomans enjoyed a sophisticated and cosmopolitan life. There's also a chair where

Atatürk supposedly had a rest in 1924. We hope he also enjoyed pide from the wood-fired oven in the peaceful garden.

A few other scraps of Ordu's old town survive, centred around the **Tasbaşı Cultural Centre**, an old Greek church with magnificent coastal views about 800m west from the main square.

Catch a dolmuş west to **Boztepe** (TL3, 6.5km) for more breathtaking views and good restaurants.

Sleeping & Eating

The accommodation and eating scene features a couple of good-value splurges.

Hotel Turist (☎ 225 3140; Atatürk Bulvarı 134; s/d/tr TL45/60/80; ♿) That's definitely 'tourist' with a small 't', but a recent paint job and good English at reception redeems this place with seafront balconies and a sunny breakfast conservatory.

Karlibel Atlıhan Hotel (☎ 225 0565; www.karlibelhotel.com.tr; Kazım Karabekir Caddesi 7; s/d/tr TL60/90/120; ♿) A professional establishment with spacious rooms in subdued colours and a horsey predilection for equine art. It's one block back from the seafront behind the *belediye* (town hall). The same company also runs two nearby boutique hotels, the seafront Atherina, and the hilltop İkizevler.

our pick İkizevler Hotel (☎ 225 0081; www.karlibelhotel.com.tr; Kazım Karabekir Caddesi 7; s/d TL60/90; ♿) The name may mean 'Two Houses', but this hilltop boutique hotel is unified in delivering 17 rooms of gracious Ottoman style. The property was originally two stately homes, and it now dominates a hilltop in Ordu's

southwest. Wooden floors, antique rugs and a view-worthy garden café all support the relaxed heritage ambience. Ask for directions at the Karlıbel Atlıhan Hotel in town.

Jazz Café (☎ 214 6778; Simpaşa Caddesi 28; mains TL3-10) A modern eatery on Ordu's pedestrian shopping drag, offering everything from pizza and omelettes to *gözleme* and *kumpir* (baked potatoes). Grab an upstairs table for great people-watching below.

Ayışığı (☎ 223 2870; Atatürk Bulvarı; mains TL4-10; ☎ 11am) Occupying a whitewashed concrete structure on the beach, the 'Moonlight' combines a terrace café, restaurant and *meyhane* (Turkish pub) to good effect. Next door is a pleasant Mondrian-styled tea garden.

Midi Restaurant (☎ 214 0340; İskele Üstü 55; mains TL7-15; ☎ 11am-11pm) Ordu's best eating combines with Ordu's best seafront ambience at this long and classy pontoon restaurant that's good for equally long and classy lunches. Local seafood provides the culinary highlights, beer and wine are available, and black-and-white pictures of old Ordu turn the heritage charm up to 11.

Getting There & Around

Ordu's otogar is 5km east on the coastal road. Buses depart regularly to Giresun (TL4, one hour) and Ünye (TL8, 1¼ hours). You can also usually flag down buses along the coastal road.

Local dolmuşes regularly loop through the city centre. Line 2 goes from the centre of town past the Karlıbel İkiyevler Hotel in one direction, and near the otogar in the other.

GİRESUN

☎ 0454 / pop 84,000

The historic town of Giresun, 46km east of Ordu, was founded around 3000 years ago. The city is credited with introducing cherries to Italy, and from there to the rest of the world. The name Giresun comes from the Greek for cherry.

Now the humble hazelnut (*fındık*) drives Giresun's economy, and the area has Turkey's finest plantations. Enjoy the edible treats and fabulous views from the hillside park near the centre.

Orientation & Information

Giresun's centre is Atapark on the coastal road. The town hall is just inland from the park. The main commercial street is Gazi Caddesi, climbing uphill from the town hall.

At the time of writing, the local tourist information was closed. Ask at the Otel Başar for a good map and brochure. The post office and internet cafés are a few hundred metres uphill from the town hall.

Sights & Activities

After your fill of hazelnuts and cherries, burn off the calories by walking 2km to the **Kalepark** (Castle Park), perched on the steep hillside above the town. This shady park has panoramic views, beer gardens and barbecues. Weekends are very busy. No public transport serves the park, so you'll need to walk (about 2km) inland and uphill from Atapark on Gazi Caddesi and turn left onto Bekirpaşa Caddesi. A taxi costs around TL3.

The **City Museum** (Şehir Müzesi; ☎ 212 1322; Atatürk Bulvarı 62; admission TL2; ☎ 8am-5pm) occupies the 18th-century Gogora church, 1.5km around the promontory east of Atapark on the coastal road. The well-preserved building outshines the usual archaeological and ethnographic exhibits.

If you've got time, head to the **alpine plateaus** about 40km inland, which offer opportunities for walking and winter sports.

Festivals & Events

The four-day **International Giresun Aksu Festival**, starting annually on May 20, hails fecundity and the new growing season with concerts, traditional dance performances and other open-air events. A highlight is boat trips out to Giresun Island (p552).

Sleeping & Eating

Er-Tur Oteli (☎ 216 1026; otelertur@mynet.com; Çapulacılar Sokak 8; s/d/tr TL50/70/90) International flags hint at something flashier, but the two-star standards are entirely acceptable at this welcoming spot on a side street east of Atapark. The staff will even squeeze a fourth traveller into a three-bed 'family' room.

Otel Çarıkçı (☎ 216 1026; Osmanağa Caddesi 6; s/d/tr TL65/100/130; ☎) More excellent value in this price range with laminate floors, tiled bathrooms and wi-fi access. It's down the first street east off Gazi Caddesi. Look for the sign featuring a curly-toed shoe.

Otel Başar (☎ 212 9920; www.hotelbasar.com.tr; Atatürk Bulvarı; s/d/tr TL75/125/150; ☎) Scratch the surface of this eight-storey blue and yellow eyesore overlooking the coastal road, and you'll find a surprisingly comfortable hotel

AMAZON ISLAND

Just 1.5km off the eastern end of Giresun Bay, the tiny Giresun Aksu is actually the biggest island on the Black Sea.

As many as 50,000 visitors a year make the short hop to the island, most during the International Giresun Aksu Festival (p551) in late May. At other times, local fishermen seem reticent to provide transport, but a cable car has been rumoured.

Visitors during the festival pay homage to the Hamza Taşı (Hamza Stone), an ancient stone up to 4000 years old said to contain magical powers enhancing fertility. Local myths claim the island's temple was first built by the Amazons (p549) and that Jason and his Argonauts stopped off to dine on local birdlife during their quest for the Golden Fleece.

Now the island's 14 different species of birds are protected, and Giresun Aksu has been declared an Important Bird Area by the International Bird Protection Council.

with English-speaking staff, a cosy brick-lined bar and a rooftop restaurant.

Deniz Lokantası (☎ 216 1158; Alpaslan Caddesi 3; mains TL3-8; 🕒 10am-10pm) Next to the town hall, this modernised cafeteria has been churning out good-value meals since 1953. Expect a short wait at lunchtime, but it's worth it.

Ellez (☎ 216 1491; Fatih Caddesi 9; TL4-12; 🕒 10am-11pm) One block north of Atapark, this compact pide-and-pizza joint attracts a younger crowd with top food and Turkish flags protruding from a tiny balcony.

Piccolo Café & Bistro (Gazi Caddesi 47; TL6-10; 🕒 9am-11pm) On the left going uphill on Giresun's main drag, the cute Piccolo does omelettes, crêpes, salads, and a wider range of java for when you're tired of Nescafe or Turkish coffee. Wi-fi's a bonus for laptop travellers.

Getting There & Away

The bus station is 4km west of the centre, but buses usually drop people at Atapark too. Minibuses shuttle from Giresun to Trabzon (TL10, two hours) and to Ordu (TL5, one hour). Trabzon services leave from the bus offices near Atapark. Buses to Ordu stop across the road outside the sprawling car park.

GİRESUN TO TRABZON

From Giresun it's another 150km to Trabzon, but the Black Sea Coastal Highway has diminished the coastal vistas. The road passes through several small towns, including the attractive town of **Tirebolu**, with a compact harbour and two castles (St Jean Kalesi and Bedrama Kalesi). The Çaykur tea-processing plant signals your arrival in Turkey's tea country.

Görele is the next town eastward, famous for big round loaves of bread. Next is **Akçakale**

with the ruins of a 13th-century Byzantine castle on a little peninsula. Shortly before reaching Trabzon is **Akçaabat**, famous for its *köfte* restaurants. The Korfez and Cemilusta are two worth trying.

TRABZON

☎ 0462 / pop 400,000

Trabzon's one of those 'love it or hate it' kind of places. Some are polarised by its slightly seedy port town character, while others appreciate the city's cosmopolitan buzz. Arguably the Black Sea coast's most sophisticated city – sorry Samsun – Trabzon is too caught up in its own whirl of activity to worry about what's happening in far-off İstanbul or Ankara.

The Black Sea's past is displayed in the gracious medieval church of Aya Sofya and the Byzantine monastery at Sumela, but in Atatürk Alanı, Trabzon's crazily busy main square, it's a thoroughly modern mix. Beeping dolmuş traffic hurtles anti-clockwise like a modern chariot race, while local students team headscarves with Converse All Stars beneath a giant screen showcasing the city's beloved Trabzonspor football team. It's infectious after take-it-easy times in the Black Sea's smaller centres.

Trabzon is the eastern Black Sea's busiest port, handling and dispatching goods for Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Iran. Expect to also see a few bleach-blonde '*natashas*' (prostitutes) from former Soviet states offering their own spin on international trade.

Trabzon definitely makes an impression, and it's as quintessential a Black Sea experience as Amasra's laid-back castle ambience, or the Kaçkar's lakes and mountains.

History

Trabzon's recorded history begins around 746 BC, when Miletus colonists came from Sinop and founded a settlement, Trapezus, with an acropolis on the *trápeza* (table) of land above the harbour.

The busy port town did reasonably well for 2000 years, until the Christian soldiers of the Fourth Crusade seized and sacked Constantinople in 1204, forcing its noble families to seek refuge in Anatolia. The Comneni imperial family established an empire along the Black Sea coast in 1204, with Alexius Comnenus I reigning as the emperor of Trebizond.

The Trapezuntine rulers skilfully balanced alliances with the Seljuks, the Mongols and the Genoese. Prospering through trade with eastern Anatolia and Persia, the empire peaked during the reign of Alexius II (1297–1330), before declining in factional disputes. The Empire of Trebizond eventually survived until the Ottoman conquest in 1461, eight years longer than Constantinople.

When the Ottoman Empire was defeated after WWI, Trabzon's Greek residents sought to establish a Republic of Trebizond echoing the old Comneni Empire. The Turks were ultimately victorious, and Atatürk declared Trabzon 'one of the richest, strongest and most sensitive sources of trust for the Turkish Republic'.

Trabzon is now a stronghold of ultranationalist Turkish politics, but this is unlikely to affect travellers.

The idolised local football (soccer) team Trabzonspor is the only team outside of İstanbul to ever have won the Turkish national league.

Orientation & Information

Trabzon's heart is the Atatürk Alanı district, also known as Meydan Parkı. The port is east of Atatürk Alanı, down a steep hill.

There are cafés and restaurants west of Atatürk Alanı along Uzun Sokak (Long Lane) and Kahramanmaraş Caddesi (Maraş Caddesi for short). West of the centre past the bazaar is Ortahisar, a picturesque old neighbourhood straddling a ravine. Trabzon's otogar is 3km east of the port.

Banks, ATMs, exchange offices and the PTT are along or around Maraş Caddesi.

Atlas Laundry (Map p555; ☎ 322 4475; Deniz Sokak; per 5kg load TL8; ☎ 10am–4pm)

Çağrı Internet (Map p555; Atatürk Alanı; per hr TL1.25; ☎ 10am–11pm)

Tourist office (Map p555; ☎ 326 4760; Camii Sokak; ☎ 8am–5.30pm daily Jun–Sep, 8am–5pm Mon–Fri Oct–May) This helpful place is used to travellers' needs and English is usually spoken.

Tourist Police (Map p555; ☎ 326 3077; Atatürk Alanı)

Ustatour (Map p555; ☎ 326 9545; Iskenderpaşa Mahallesi 3) Domestic airline agent in the Usta Park Hotel.

VIP Internet (Map p555; Gazipaşa Caddesi 6; per hr TL1.25; ☎ 9am–midnight)

Sights & Activities

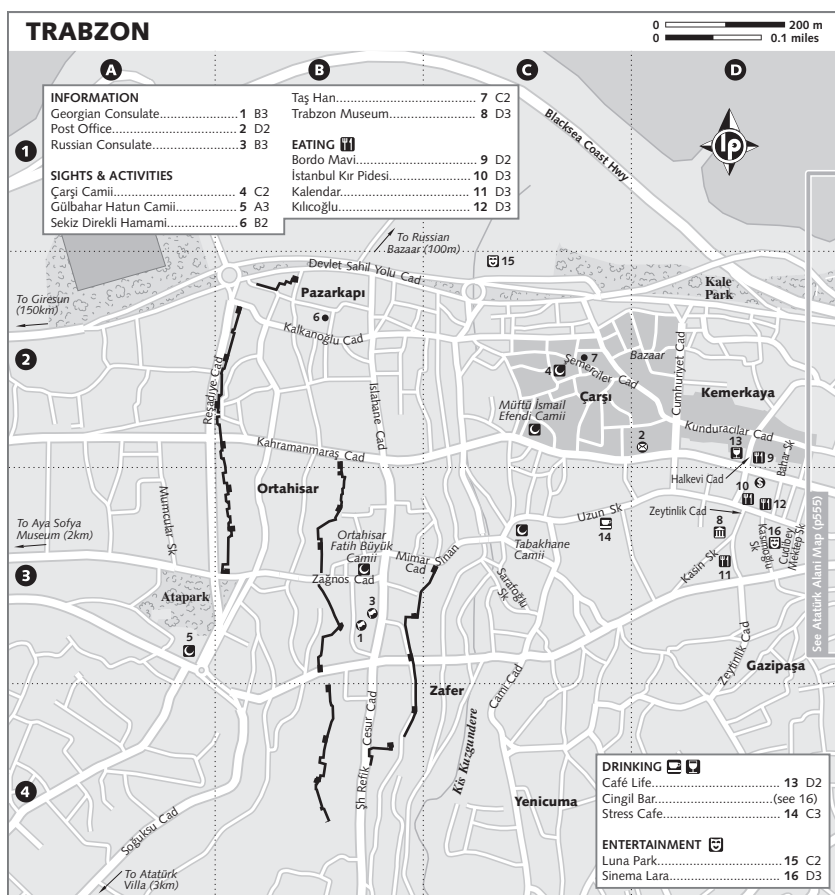
TRABZON MUSEUM

Just south of Uzun Sokak, this Italian-designed mansion was built for a Russian merchant in 1912 and inhabited briefly by Atatürk. It now houses the **Trabzon Museum** (Trabzon Müzesi; Map p554; Zeytinlik Caddesi 10; admission TL3; ☎ 9am–noon & 1–6pm Tue–Sun). The fantastic interiors and original furnishings put most Ottoman re-creations to shame, with a series of impressive high-ceilinged rooms displaying ethnographic and Islamic artefacts, mostly labelled in English. The basement archaeological section also has significant pieces, including a flattened bronze statue of Hermes from local excavations at Tabakhane and Byzantine finds from near Sumela.

AYA SOFYA MUSEUM

Originally called Hagia Sophia (Church of the Divine Wisdom), the **Aya Sofya Museum** (Aya Sofya Müzesi; ☎ 223 3033; admission TL3; ☎ 9am–6pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct, 9am–5pm Tue–Sun Nov–Mar) is located 4km west of Trabzon's centre on a terrace that once held a pagan temple. Built in the late Byzantine period, between 1238 and 1263, the church has clearly been influenced by Georgian and Seljuk design, although the wall paintings and mosaic floors follow the prevailing Constantinople style of the time. It was converted to a mosque after the Ottoman conquest in 1461, and later used as an ammunition storage depot and hospital by the Russians, before being fully restored in the 1960s.

Enter the Aya Sofya through the western entrance into the vaulted narthex to view the best-preserved frescoes of various biblical themes. Entering the church, its design becomes immediately obvious. A cross-in-square plan is topped by a single dome showing Georgian influence. A fresco in the southern portico depicts Adam and Eve's expulsion. Look for a relief of an eagle, the



symbol of the founders, the Comnenus family. Unfortunately most of the frescoes within arm's reach have been heavily defaced. Flash photography is prohibited to preserve the remaining painted fragments.

Beside the museum is a square bell tower, a reconstructed farmhouse, and a *serander* (granary) from Of county, set on tall posts to combat vermin.

The site is above the coastal highway, reachable by dolmuş (TL1.25) from the northern side of Atatürk Alani.

ATATÜRK VILLA

Escape busy Trabzon at the **Atatürk Villa** (Atatürk Köşkü; ☎ 231 0028; admission TL2; 🕒 8am-7pm May-Sep, 8am-5pm Oct-Apr), 5km southwest of

Atatürk Alani. Set above Trabzon in a forested neighbourhood, it has fine views and lovely gardens. The three-storey white villa, designed in a Black Sea-style popular in the Crimea, was built between 1890 and 1903 for a wealthy Trabzon banking family, and given to Atatürk when he visited in 1924. It's now a museum of Atatürk memorabilia. Don't miss the simple table in the study with a map of the WWI Dardanelles campaign scratched into the wood.

City buses labelled 'Köşk', leaving from the northern side of Atatürk Alani, drop you outside the villa (TL1.20). Don't get out at the stop that says 'Atatürk Köşk 200m'. The actual stop is a steep 1km trek further up the hill.

BAZAAR DISTRICT

Trabzon's bazaar is west of Atatürk Alanı in the Çarşı (Market) quarter, accessible by the pedestrianised Kunduraçılar Caddesi from Atatürk Alanı. After the touristy vibe of İstanbul's Grand Bazaar, it's down to earth and proudly local. Close to the restored **Çarşı Camii** (Market Mosque; Map p554), is the **Taş Han** (or Vakıf Han; Map p554), a single-domed *han* (caravanserai) constructed around 1647, and the oldest marketplace in Trabzon. It's now full of workshops and stores.

MOSQUE OF THE OTTOMANS

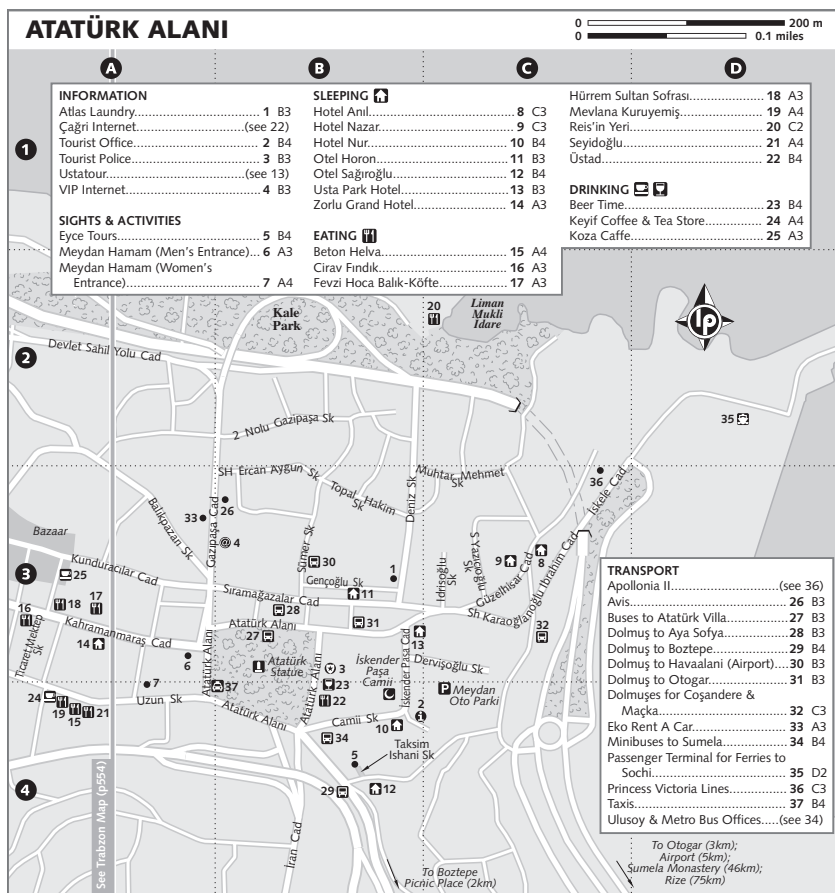
West of the centre, **Gülbahar Hatun Camii** (Map p554) is another interesting mosque. It was

built in 1514 by Selim the Grim, the great Ottoman conqueror of Syria and Egypt, in honour of his mother, Gülbahar Hatun. Next to it, the **Atapark** (Map p554) has a tea garden and a reconstructed wooden *serander*.

BOZTEPE PICNIC PLACE

On the hillside 2km southeast of Atatürk Alanı is the **Boztepe Picnic Place** (Boztepe Piknik Alanı), with fine views of the city and the sea, tea gardens and restaurants. In ancient times, Boztepe harboured temples to the Persian sun god Mithra. Later the Byzantines built churches and monasteries here. Now it's a top place for a sunset beer.

From Atatürk Alanı, take a frequent Boztepe dolmuş (TL1.25), from near the southern end



of Atatürk Alanı. The route goes uphill 2.2km to Boztepe park.

HAMAMS

The **Sekiz Direkli Hamamı** (Map p554; Direkli Hamamı Sokak; sauna & massage TL25; ☎ men 7am-5pm Fri-Wed, women 8am-5pm Thu), 600m west of the Çarşı Camii, is Trabzon's best Turkish bath. The rough-hewn pillars – 'Sekiz Direkli' translates to 'Eight Columns' – date from Seljuk times, although the rest of the building has been modernised. A few of the creaking old-timers who work there appear to be only slightly younger. They're damn strong though. Expect a very robust massage.

The **Meydan Hamam** (Map p555; Maraş Caddesi; sauna TL12; ☎ men 6am-11pm, women 9am-6pm), in central Trabzon, is clean and efficiently run, but not as atmospheric as the Sekiz Direkli. The women's entrance is around the corner.

Tours

Eyce Tours (Map p555; ☎ 326 7174; www.eycetours.com, in Turkish; Taksim İşhanı Sokak 11) offers day trips to Sumela (TL20, departing 10am daily), Uzungöl (TL30, departing 9am daily) and Ayder (TL50, minimum six people).

Bus companies **Ulusoy** and **Metro** also run day trips in summer to Sumela (TL20) and Uzungöl (TL30), leaving from outside their offices (Map p555) at the southern end of Atatürk Alanı.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Many of the cheapies off the northeastern corner of Atatürk Alanı and along the coastal road double as brothels. At the time of writing, the following places had the tourist office tick of approval.

Hotel Nur (Map p555; ☎ 323 0445; Camii Sokak 15; s/d 40/60; ☎) A long-standing, but often over-popular travellers' favourite, with amiable, English-speaking staff and small, brightly painted rooms. Downstairs is a lounge that's good for getting the latest travellers' low-down on Georgia. The nearby mosque doesn't skimp on the 5am call to prayer.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Anıl (Map p555; ☎ 326 7282; Güzelhisar Caddesi 12; s/d TL50/80; ☎) A promisingly flash reception lures travellers in, and the rooms in pink and yellow are actually good value, especially with the addition of new bathrooms, wi-fi and

aircon. It's built into the side of a hill, so even the downstairs rooms have views.

Hotel Nazar (Map p555; ☎ 323 0081; www.nazarhotel.net; Güzelhisar Caddesi 5; s/d TL70/100; ☎) Look beyond the flagrant photoshopping in the brochure (flower gardens in central Trabzon? Yeah right), and the Nazar is a smart business-class option. There's usually someone on board who speaks English.

Otel Sağıroğlu (Map p555; ☎ 3323 2899; www.sagirogluotel.com, in Turkish; Taksim İşhanı Sokak 1; s/d/tr TL70/100/120; ☎) This large yellow block calls itself a 'Butik Otel'. Er...not quite. How about a solid midranger with a few rooms featuring heritage wooden floors and a faux gentlemen's club ambience?

Otel Horon (Map p555; ☎ 326 6455; www.otelhoron.com; Sıramağazalar Caddesi 125; s/d TL90/125; ☎) The aubergine-coloured exterior conceals unflashy rooms amidst 1970s decor. Wi-fi, well-stocked minibars and city views from the rooftop bar/restaurant overcome any shortcomings in design. The Horon employs some female reception staff, so you're guaranteed propriety.

Usta Park Hotel (Map p555; ☎ 326 5700; www.usta-parkhotel.com; Iskenderpaşa Mahallesi 3; s/d/tr €115/140/170; ☎) Leather sofas and Turkish muzak in the marble-trimmed lobby provide comfort to the expense-account business travellers at the Usta Park. There's also a restaurant, bar, fitness centre, travel agency and hamam on offer. A wall clock shows the time in Moscow if you're still wondering who the core clientele are.

TOP END

Zorlu Grand Hotel (Map p555; ☎ 326 8400; www.zorulugrand.com; Maraş Caddesi 9; s/d €300/350, ste €400-950; ☎ ☎ ☎) Understated is jettisoned at this ludicrously extravagant five-star. The immense mezzanine atrium is quite staggering, but unfortunately some of the furniture is looking worn and the carpet grubby. The rack rates are also ridiculous, so negotiate a substantial discount if you want to enjoy the roll call of amenities including restaurants, a pub and a hamam.

Eating

Trabzon is not the Black Sea's gastronomic high point, but scores of good eateries line Atatürk Alanı and the two streets to the west.

Seyidoğlu (Map p555; Uzun Sokak 15a; dishes TL1.50-2.50) This compact snack stop has been serving up succulent, thin-crust *lahmacun* and kebabs for four decades. Roll up a few

lahmacun with fresh salad and you can't go wrong.

Istanbul Kır Pidesi (Map p554; ☎ 321 2212; Uzun Sokak 48; mains TL3-5) Three floors of wood-fired goodness for the pide and *börek* (filled pastries) aficionado within. C'mon, pide is almost good for you.

Kalendar (Map p554; Zeytinlik Caddesi 10; mains TL3.50) Low tables and mood lighting give this place near the Trabzon Museum a cosmopolitan vibe. It's perfect for a post-museum coffee or brunch of *menemen* (eggs scrambled with tomatoes, onions, peppers and white cheese) and toast (TL3.50), if you're getting tired of cucumbers, tomatoes and cheese.

Hürrem Sultan Sofrası (Map p555; ☎ 321 8651; Maraş Caddesi 30; mains TL4-10) This popular lunch spot sometimes includes regional dishes like *muhlama* and *kuyamak* (both melted cheese dishes; see p561) in their daily offerings. Businessmen, students and the local cops; no-one's safe from becoming a regular at this friendly spot where 'Where are you from?' will probably be asked in the very first minute.

Üstad (Map p555; ☎ 326 5406; Atatürk Alanı 18b; meals TL5-8) Locals squeeze into this compact *lokanta* right on Trabzon's main square. We can thoroughly recommend the *biber dolması* (stuffed peppers) that come with a surprisingly robust pinch of chilli reinforcing how far east you've travelled.

Bordo Mavi (Map p554; ☎ 326 2077; Halkevi Caddesi 12; meals TL6-10; ☎ 11am-10pm) This cosmopolitan garden café adjoins the clubhouse of Trabzonspor, the local football team. It's not at all boozy and noisy though. The strongest drink you'll get is a Coke, and the excellent pizzas and pasta have an authentic tinge of Italy. Next door is a shop selling Trabzonspor merchandise. Don't you know New York Yankees caps are passé?

Reis'in Yeri (Map p554; Liman Mukli İdare; meals TL8-14; Liman Mukli İdare; ☎ 11am-11pm) Surrounded by traffic around Atatürk Alanı, it's easy to forget Trabzon is a coastal city. Head down the hill and across the pedestrian overbridge to this sprawling fish/chicken/*köfte* grill place that also doubles as a beer garden. It's guaranteed *domuş-free*, and you can even hire rowboats to steer around the tiny cove.

Fevzi Hoca Balık-Köfte (Map p555; ☎ 326 5444; İpek yolu İş Merkezi, Maraş Caddesi; meals TL12-25; ☎ noon-9.30pm) There are no menus at this fish restaurant. Just choose your glistening beastie and it comes in a meal deal with salads,

pickles and dessert. The hushed ambience resembles somewhere you'd go with your parents for a birthday dinner. Cheaper *köfte* meals (TL5) are available if you're a bargain-seeking fish phobic. It's on the 1st floor of a shopping arcade.

Trabzon's sweetest street is represented by **Kılıçoğlu** (Map p554; ☎ 321 4525; Uzun Sokak 42; deserts from TL3) with an irresistible array of ice cream and pastries. Across the way, **Mevlana Kuruyemiş** (Map p555; ☎ 321 9622; Uzun Sokak 31) is a renowned *kuruyemiş* (dried fruit) vendor, and also sells *lokum* (Turkish delight), *helva* (a traditional sweet made from sesame seeds), *pestil* (sheets of dried fruit) and excellent *kestane balı* (chestnut honey). Nearby, old-fashioned **Beton Helva** (Map p555; ☎ 321 2550; Uzun Sokak 15b) sells sweet slabs of *helva* that look like loaves of bread. Down a nearby lane is **Cırah Fındık** (Map p555; ☎ 322 2050; Ticaret Mektep Sokak 8c), off Maraş Caddesi, a tiny shop that's supplied Trabzon folk with hazelnuts and confectionery since 1940.

Drinking & Entertainment

Trabzon has a small drinking scene, but most places close by midnight.

Keyif Coffee & Tea Store (Map p555; ☎ 326 8026; Canbakkal İş Merkezi, Uzun Sokak 37; ☎ 8am-10pm) Trabzon's studenty types gather amidst Anglophile vintage sporting gear and leather armchairs to enjoy more than 200 varieties of hot beverage.

Koza Caffè (Map p555; ☎ 321 0225; cnr Kunduraçılar Caddesi & Sanat Sokak 1; ☎ 10am-11pm) Ignore the incongruous medieval decor and settle in for coffee, beer and wine with a soundtrack of bouncy Turkish pop. Get lucky and grab a seat at the tiny outdoor balcony.

Stress Café (Map p554; ☎ 321 3044; Uzun Sokak) Stress? You must be joking. One of Trabzon's best live music and nargileh spots, the Stress Café is so laid-back it's almost horizontal. The Ottomans-R-Us decor is a bit naff, but it's an undeniably relaxing haven. Look for the backgammon-playing mannequins out front.

Beer Time (Map p555; Atatürk Alanı; ☎ noon-11pm) Definitely does what it says on the tin. Downstairs it's a rough and ready pub with 0.7L handles of Efes, while upstairs it's a little quieter and a good spot for drinkers of either gender to watch the nightly *domuş* races around Atatürk Alanı. On your marks, get set...

Café Life (Map p554; ☎ 321 2955; Halkevi Caddesi 15) Two floors up past wildlife pics from National Geographic, this is one of Trabzon's more vibrant nightlife venues with live music, fast food and free-flowing booze.

Cingil Bar (Map p554; 1st fl Gazipaşa Mahallesi Saray Çarşısı, Kasımoğlu Sokak) Hidden in a shopping arcade, this cosy music bar with a collage of your favourite musos (c 1975) is a good spot for a quiet drink away from the blokey beer halls. There's occasional live music at weekends. From Sinema Lara head upstairs to the opposite end of the arcade.

Sinema Lara (Map p554; ☎ 321 0006; Gazipaşa Mahallesi Saray Çarşısı 5, Kasımoğlu Sokak; admission TL8) Hollywood blockbusters show just days after their international release. How's that for globalisation?

Head to **Luna Park** between the old and new coastal roads for Black Sea fairground action.

Shopping

Thanks to the influx of cheap goods from former Soviet territories, Trabzon is a good place for cheap clothes, especially from the stalls along Karaoğlanoğlu Caddesi (Map p555). If you're lucky you might even find a few correctly spelt Western logos on the T-shirts, sweatshirts and sports shoes.

This is the former location of the **Russian Bazaar**, now relocated to a purpose-built hall in grassy wasteland near the Black Sea Coastal Highway. It's a shadow of its former self with only a few stalls run by émigrés from the former Soviet states. The bazaar also has clothing with lookalike labels you've nearly heard of, and martial arts DVDs starring Jackie Van Damme and Jean-Claude Van Damme. Or is that...

Leather shops along Sıramağazalar Caddesi (Map p555) sell jackets, bags and other garments, with alterations and made-to-measure fittings available. Expect to pay around half as much as in İstanbul's Grand Bazaar.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Turkish Airlines (☎ 444 0849; www.thy.com) has daily flights to Ankara, İstanbul (both airports) and İzmir. There are also flights to Bursa (Wednesday and Saturday) and Antalya (Thursday and Sunday).

Pegasus Airlines (☎ 444 0737; www.flypgs.com) has two daily direct flights to İstanbul (Sabiha

Gökçen airport) and one to Ankara. **Onur Air** (☎ 444 6687; www.onurair.com.tr) has three daily direct flights to İstanbul Atatürk, and during summer **SunExpress** (☎ 444 0797; www.sunexpress.com.tr) flies to İstanbul five times a week, Sivas and Bursa twice a week, and Adana and Antalya once a week.

At the time of writing **Azerbaijan Airways** (www.azal.az) was trialling a Tuesday flight (30 minutes; €155) from Trabzon to Baku. Check with Ustatour (p553) for the latest.

BOAT

Timetables for ferries to Sochi in Russia change with alarming regularity, but at the time of writing the following was correct. Check the latest situation at the following shipping offices. Both are down the hill from Atatürk Alanı on İskele Caddesi. The sailing takes around 12 hours.

Princess Victoria Lines (Map p555; ☎ 326 6674; İskele Caddesi 53a) sail Monday and Thursday evening, departing Trabzon at 10pm (one way US\$90).

Apollonia II (Map p555; ☎ 326 484; İskele Caddesi) sails at 5pm on Fridays (US\$75).

When you book your ticket ask when you'll need to report to the port police as it's usually several hours before the departure time. For visa information see p680.

BUS

Trabzon's otogar is 3km east of the port, on the landward side of the coastal road. It is served by dolmuşes to Atatürk Alanı.

There are no direct buses to Ayder and the Kaçkar Mountains. Catch a bus heading to Hopa and change at Pazar or Ardeşsen.

CAR

Car rental agencies include **Avis** (Map p555; ☎ 322 3740; Gazipaşa Caddesi 20) and **Eko Rent A Car** (Map p555; ☎ 322 2575; Gazipaşa Caddesi 3/53).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The *havaalanı* (airport) is 5.5km east of Atatürk Alanı. Dolmuşes to the airport (TL2) leave from a side street on the northern side of Atatürk Alanı, but drop you on the opposite side of the coastal road, 500m from the terminal entrance. Alternatively, pay TL8 extra to be dropped at the door. A taxi costs about TL20. Buses bearing the legend 'Park' or 'Meydan' go to Atatürk Alanı from the airport.

SERVICES FROM TRABZON'S OTOGAR

Destination	Fare	Duration (hr)	Distance (km)	Frequency
Ankara	TL45	12	780	several per day
Artvin	TL22	4½	255	frequent
Baku, Azerbaijan	US\$50	30		1 weekly
Erzurum	TL25	6	325	several per day
Hopa	TL15	3½	165	half-hourly
Istanbul	TL60	24	1110	several per day
Kars	TL35	10	525	1 nightly or change at Erzurum or Artvin
Kayseri	TL45	12	686	several per day
Rize	TL6	1	75	half-hourly
Samsun	TL25	6	355	frequent
Sinop	TL38	9	533	1 at 8pm
Tbilisi, Georgia	US\$30	20		several per day
Erivan	US\$60	25		8am Thu & Sun

BUS & DOLMUŞ

To reach Atatürk Alanı from the otogar, cross the shore road in front of the terminal, turn left, walk to the bus stop and catch any bus with 'Park' or 'Meydan' in its name. The dolmuş for Atatürk Alanı is marked 'Garajlar-Meydan'. A taxi between the otogar and Atatürk Alanı costs around TL10.

To get to Trabzon's otogar catch a dolmuş marked 'Garajlar' or 'KTÜ' from the north-eastern side of Atatürk Alanı.

Dolmuşes mainly leave from Atatürk Alanı, although you can flag them down along their routes. Whatever your destination, the fare should be TL1.50.

TAXI

Trabzon's main taxi stand is on Atatürk Alanı.

SUMELA MONASTERY

The Greek Orthodox **Monastery of the Virgin Mary** (admission TL8; ☎ 9am-6pm) at Sumela, 46km south of Trabzon, is an undeniable highlight of the Black Sea coast. The monastery was founded in Byzantine times and abandoned in 1923 after the creation of the Turkish Republic quashed local Greek aspirations for a new state.

Sumela clings improbably to a sheer rock wall high above evergreen forests and a rushing mountain stream. It's a mysterious place, especially when mists swirl in the tree-lined valley below and the call of a hidden mosque drifts ethereally through the forest.

To get to Sumela, take the Erzurum road and turn left at Maçka, 29km south of

Trabzon. It's also signposted as Meryemana (Virgin Mary), to whom the monastery was dedicated. The road then winds into dense evergreen forests, following the course of a rushing mountain stream punctuated by commercial trout pools and fish restaurants.

At the entrance to the **Altındere Vadisi Milli Parkı** (Altındere Valley National Park) there's an TL8 charge for private vehicles and a TL3 per person entry fee. If you're visiting by public transport, try and catch a dolmuş from Trabzon at around 8am to avoid the mid-morning flow of tour groups.

At the end of the road from the entrance you'll find a shady riverside park with picnic tables, a post office, restaurant and several bungalows for rent (no camping is allowed).

The main trail to the monastery begins by the restaurant and is steep but easy to follow. A second trail begins further up the valley. Follow the concreted road 1km uphill and across two bridges until you come to a wooden footbridge over the stream on the right. This trail cuts straight up through the trees, past the shell of the Ayavarvara chapel. It's usually much quieter than the main route.

If you drive further up the road from the restaurant, you'll reach a small car park, from which it's only a 10-minute walk to the monastery. A few kilometres before the car park is a lookout point with the monastery suspended on a cliff face high above the forest.

From the restaurant to the monastery, you'll ascend 250m in about 30 to 45 minutes, and the air gets noticeably cooler as you climb through forests and alpine meadows. After the ticket office, a steep flight of steps leads

to the monastery complex sheltered underneath a hefty outcrop. The main chapel, cut into the rock, is the indisputable highlight, covered both inside and outside with colourful frescoes. The earliest examples date from the 9th century, but most of them are actually 19th-century work. Sadly, bored shepherd boys used the paintings as targets for their catapults, and later heedless visitors – from Russian tourists to US Air Force grunts (1965 vintage) – scratched their names into them, proving that idiocy is indeed international. Even in a new century Turkish visitors sadly feel the need to validate their visit with the scrawl of a marker pen.

In recent years the monastery has been substantially restored to showcase the various chapels and rooms used by pious types in earlier centuries. Restoration continues, but in no way detracts from this essential Black Sea experience.

Sleeping & Eating

Most travellers visit Sumela as a day trip from Trabzon, but the following are good bases for exploring the surrounding area on a self-drive basis.

Coşandere Tesisleri Restaurant & Pansiyon (☎ 0462-531 1190; www.cosandere.com, in Turkish; Sümela Yolu; r from TL40) Located in Coşandere, a sleepy stream-fed village 5km out of Maçka, this place has three converted, pine-clad *seranders* sleeping up to six, and a huge motel-like building favoured by tour groups. The owners organise various tours, treks and day trips. Anyone for a *yayla* (villages) safari or a 4WD truck trip? It's a handy way to get out and about in the mountains if you don't have your own transport.

Sümela Sosyal Tesisleri (☎ 0462-531 1207; www.sumelaotel.com; bungalows from TL100) Right by the car park at Sumela itself, these comfortable A-frame bungalows have full amenities, including kitchenettes. Despite the wooden floors and Turkish rugs, the bungalows are a bit overpriced, but you're really paying for the attractive setting.

Getting There & Away

From May to the end of August, Ulusoy and Metro (p556) run buses from Trabzon to Sumela, departing at 10am and returning at 3pm.

Dolmuşes for Maçka and Coşandere village depart all day from the minibus ranks down the hill from Atatürk Alanı on Karaoğlanoğlu

Caddesi (Map p555). It'll cost you around TL15 return to Sumela, but you may have to wait until the driver decides enough people are coming. For an extra TL5 you'll know exactly when you're leaving with Ulusoy or Metro.

TRABZON TO ERZURUM

Heading south into the mountains, you're in for a long (325km) but scenic ride. Along the highway south, **Maçka** is 29km inland from Trabzon. About 1.5km north of Maçka, look out for basaltic rock columns resembling California's Devil's Postpile or Northern Ireland's Giant's Causeway. From Maçka, the mountain road ascends through active landslide zones towards the **Zigana Geçidi** (Zigana Pass; 2030m).

The dense, humid air of the coast disappears as you rise and becomes light and dry as you reach the southern side of the eastern Black Sea mountains. Snow can be seen in all months except perhaps July, August and September.

Gümüşhane, about 145km south of Trabzon, is a small town in a mountain valley with a few simple travellers' services.

At the provincial capital of **Bayburt**, 195km from Trabzon, you reach the rolling steppe and low mountains of the high Anatolian plateau. A dry, desolate place, Bayburt has a big medieval fortress.

The road from Bayburt passes through rolling green farm country with poplar trees and flocks of brown-fleeced sheep. In early summer wild flowers dominate.

Exactly 33km past Bayburt is the **Kop Geçidi** (Kop Pass; 2370m), with excellent views. From Kop Geçidi, the open road to Erzurum offers fast, easy travelling.

UZUNGÖL

☎ 0462 / pop 2800

With its lakeside mosque and Swiss-style forested mountains, Uzungöl is another Turkish scene that's on display in tourist offices around the country. The idyllic scenery still exists, but be prepared for an overlay of a few tacky hotels and a growing number of visitors from the Gulf States. You'll even see a few menus in Arabic dotted around town. Uzungöl is a worthwhile day trip or overnight stop, and a good base for day hikes in the Soğanlı Mountains to the lakes around Demirkapı (Holdizen). Note that summer weekends get very busy, so try and visit during the week.

GOOD-TASTING CABBAGE? SURELY NOT

The eastern Black Sea has a unique culture, and chances are you'll first experience the region's uncommon character through your stomach. Local cuisine provides a few taste sensations you won't find anywhere else.

The people of the Black Sea have a reverence for cabbage only surpassed by certain Eastern Europeans, and no trip would be complete without sampling *labana sarması* (stuffed cabbage rolls) or *labana lobia* (cabbage and beans). Even if you're not a cabbage fan, these fibre-rich dishes are both healthy and tasty.

Also very popular are *muhlama* (or *mihlama*) and *kuymak*, both types of thick molten cheese served in a metal dish, much like a fondue or raclette, but without the fiddly carrot and celery sticks. Scooped up with bread for breakfast, it can sit heavily in your stomach, especially if it's followed by a long bus ride. Try it instead in the mountain villages of the Kaçkars, where it's cooked with egg for a lighter effect. It will set you up for a long day's trekking.

If your taste buds aren't reacting to these savoury treats, consider *laz böreği*, a delicious flaky pastry layered with custard. Like most Turkish desserts, a few bites can easily become a daily addiction. And when you consider that many of Turkey's pastry chefs are from the Black Sea, you just know it's going to be good.

A good place to try Laz food is the Sevimli Konak (p562) in Rize.

Ensar Otel (☎ 656 6321; www.ensarotel.com; Fatih Caddesi 18; r TL150-200) is an attractive resort with comfortable bungalows. Everything is wood panelled except the roof, and there's traditional decoration throughout. The bungalows sleep up to four, and the restaurant has live music on summer weekends. It's at the opposite end of the lake to the mosque amidst a clutched of wood-trimmed pansiyons (around TL 40/80 for a single/double). Nearby you can rent **mountain bikes** (per hour TL2) to circumnavigate the lake.

On the main road into Uzungöl are cheaper and simpler pansiyons (around TL30/60 for a single/double), and in the centre of the village opposite the mosque, the **Euxinus Café & Motel** (☎ 0532 622 0652; ekrmtn@hotmai.com; r TL80) has comfortable rooms accommodating up to three people, and a popular **café** that doubles as a hang out for Uzungöl's internet-literati (TL1.50 per hour).

A couple of **minibuses** travel daily between Trabzon and Uzungöl; Ulusoy (p556) has a daily service at 9am in summer (TL30). Alternatively, take a Rize-bound dolmuş to Of (TL5) and then wait for another heading inland. Eyce Tours (p556) runs regular day trips (TL30) from Trabzon.

RİZE

☎ 0464 / pop 78,000

Around 75km east of Trabzon, in the heart of Turkey's tea-plantation area, Rize is a modern city centred on a bustling main square.

The hillsides above town are thickly planted with tea, which is dried, blended, and shipped throughout Turkey. There are a couple of excellent eating options, and Rize is a good spot for a refreshing cuppa as you break your journey east or west.

Orientation & Information

The main square, Atatürk Anıtı with a beautifully reconstructed PTT and the Şeyh Camii, is 200m inland from the coastal road, Menderes Bulvarı. The hotels are east of the main square along or just off Cumhuriyet Caddesi, one block inland and parallel to Menderes Bulvarı. The otogar is along Cumhuriyet Caddesi, 1km northwest of the main square.

The friendly **tourist office** (☎ 213 0408; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri mid-May-mid-Sep) is on the main square next to the PTT. Ask for the handy guide, 'Rize - From Now Every Season'.

Sahra Internet Café (Atatürk Caddesi; per hr TL1; ☎ 10am-11pm) is one block back from the main square.

Sights

Up the hill behind the tourist office you'll find the **Rize museum** (☎ 214 0235; Ulubatlı Sokak; admission TL3; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Tue-Sun), a fine reconstructed Ottoman house with a lovely *serander*. The rooms upstairs have been decorated in traditional style, with artefacts and an old radio to remind you that the later Ottomans were part of the modern age. Mannequins model traditional Laz costumes

ONE OF THE LAZ

Rize is the last major centre of the Laz people (see p49), a loose community numbered at around 250,000, of which 150,000 still speak the Caucasian-based Lazuri language. Known for their colourful traditional costumes and *lazeberi* folk music, you can see Laz cultural performances at any major local festival in the Rize region.

However, calling someone Laz is not that straightforward. The Turkish Laz strenuously dispute any kind of categorisation that would lump them in with their Georgian counterparts. Local folk of non-Laz backgrounds call themselves 'Karadenizli' (from the Black Sea), and many Turks use Laz as a lazy (or should that be Lazy?) catch-all term for anyone living east of Samsun.

The majority population in towns like Pazar and Ardeşen, the Laz are just as keen to distance themselves from other coastal citizens, and dismiss the stereotype of the simple anchovy-munching 'Laz fisherman' that is the butt of countless Turkish jokes.

The Laz are actually having the last laugh because many of Turkey's shipping lines are owned by wealthy Laz families. They routinely resource their boats with Laz sailors, so don't be surprised if a few retired maritime types regale you in pretty good English with their memories of San Francisco, Sri Lanka or Singapore.

from central Rize and Hemşin costumes from the Ayder region.

Don't miss Rize's fragrant and floral **tea garden**, 900m above town via the steep road behind the Şeyh Camii (it's signposted in English 'Çaykur Tea and Botany Garden'). Enjoy the superb views with a fresh brew of the local leaves (TL1) – a typical Rizeli experience. A taxi from outside the mosque is around TL5.

The town's ancient **castle** was built by the Genoese on the steep hill at the back of town. Signs point the way up Kale Sokak from Atatürk Caddesi.

Sleeping

Hotel Milano (☎ 213 0028; www.hotelmilanorize.com, in Turkish; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 169; s/d/tr TL40/60/110; 🚰 📺) Newly painted in yellow tones and with Ezy-Kleen tile floors, this friendly spot has maybe the best shower pressure in all of Rize. Wi-fi and a central location do the trick too.

Otel Kaçkar (☎ 213 1490; www.otelkackar.com, in Turkish; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 101; s/d/tr TL60/90/120; 🚰 📺) Just off the main square, look out for the Kaçkar's mosaic facade, which conceals the neat and simple rooms. There's a hamam round the back. It's favoured by tour groups so you might want to phone ahead.

Eating & Drinking

Deragh Pastaneleri (☎ 532 1704; Deniz Caddesi 19; mains TL4-7; 🕒 7am-10pm) This gleaming modern *pastane* (patisserie) has been luring fans of sweet and savoury flavours since 1985. There's also wi-fi access, so come early for breakfast and

check your email. There's a smaller second branch at Atatürk Caddesi 356.

our pick Bekiroğlu (☎ 217 1380; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 161; mains TL5-8; 🕒 9am-10pm) A cut above most Turkish *lokantas*, Bekiroğlu has a modern interior, and the busy, bustling waiters summon up all their limited knowledge of English to treat you like a regular. Inside the huge display cases are 1001 variations on salads and kebabs, but there's also top-notch pide on offer. Come hungry – the meals are huge – and leave wishing this place would open up in your hometown. Leave room for dessert with Bekiroğlu's superb *fırn sütlaç* (baked rice pudding). One of the best eateries on the coast, and the only reason you need to rest up in Rize.

Sevimli Konak (☎ 217 0895; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; mains TL5-10) This restored Ottoman house with a garden setting is a good spot to try local Laz food like *muhlama* and *labana sarması* (p561). You'll find the Sevimli Konak around 300m northwest of the main square en route to the otogar.

Nat's Cocktails & Bar (Deniz Caddesi 3) OK, you might struggle to get a perfectly prepared Cosmopolitan, but this cosy spot opposite the Deragh Pastaneleri is a top spot for an Efes at the end of the day.

Getting There & Away

From Rize's otogar, frequent minibuses run to Hopa (TL9, 1½ hours) and Trabzon (TL6, one hour). In summer there are daily direct services to Ayder (TL12, 1¾ hours). Otherwise take an eastbound minibus to Pazar (TL5) or Ardeşen (TL5.50) and change for Ayder. A few local minibuses also travel to

Hopa and Trabzon from a mini-otogar 150m northeast of Rize's main square on the old coastal road. From the Deragh Pastaneleri turn east (right).

HOPA

☎ 0466 / pop 24,000

Hopa is the archetypal border town with cheap hotels, traders markets, and a depressingly functional vibe. Just 30km southwest of the Georgian border and 165km east of Trabzon, it's best appreciated on a grey day with a bad rakı hangover. It'll probably feel like that anyway. Even when the Black Sea shimmers blue, Hopa can feel mighty gloomy. Stay here only if you're heading to or arriving from Georgia and have arrived too late to move on. There's a PTT, a couple of banks with ATMs, and internet cafés. Note that Hopa's exchange offices give lousy rates for Georgian lari, knowing that you won't be able to change them anywhere else.

Sleeping

Otel İmren (☎ 351 4069; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; s/d TL15/25) Here's one for the budget-conscious Georgian traveller. Spearmint decor and relatively clean rooms provide cheap digs before or after the border crossing. Downstairs cards are played in a smoky and very masculine atmosphere. It's on the main drag in the centre of town.

Otel Ustabaş (☎ 351 4507; Ortahopa Caddesi; s/d TL30/50; ♿) An OK budget deal, with blinding carpets and optional shower heads offset by simple comforts and a café downstairs. Only in Hopa would this place be dubbed 'three star'.

Otel Huzur (☎ 351 4095; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 25; s/d TL35/55) Newish rooms, some with sea views, and wi-fi feature at this friendly spot used to travellers doing the Black Sea shuffle to Georgia. It's on the main road opposite the truck park.

Otel Cihan (☎ 351 4897; www.hotelcihan.com; Ortahopa Caddesi 36; s/d TL50/70; ♿) This yellow tower offers a bar and rooftop restaurant along with small, well-equipped rooms with satellite TV, wi-fi and minibars. It's 300m along the coast road, next to a petrol station.

Eating & Drinking

Green Kebap (☎ 351 4277; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; mains TL3-6; ☎ 9am-10pm) Does exactly what it says on the tin, with two terraces and a brick dining room dishing up pide and kebaps in a shady park.

There's a nearby *tekel bayii* (off licence) to score a cold beer after a dusty bus journey.

Down a narrow lane off Cumhuriyet Caddesi the **Hayde Café** is a rooftop bar with occasional live music.

Getting There & Away

The otogar is on the western side of the Sundura Çayı, on the road to Artvin. Direct buses from Hopa to Erzurum (TL30, six hours) leave at 9am, 4pm and 7pm. There are also regular buses or minibuses to Artvin (TL12, 1½ hours), Rize (TL8, 1½ hours) and Trabzon (TL15, 3½ hours). For Kars (TL18, 11 hours), there's one direct bus at 10.30am.

Minibuses for Sarp (TL8) and the Georgian border leave from the petrol station beside the Otel Cihan and the stand at the Sundura Çayı junction north of the otogar. Trabzon–Tbilisi buses also pass through Hopa, some going via the Posof border crossing (Türkçözü, TL40, 10 hours). For more details on crossing to Georgia, see p679.

KAÇKAR MOUNTAINS

The Kaçkar Mountains (Kaçkar Dağları) form a rugged range bordered by the Black Sea coast to the north and the Çoruh River to the south. The range stretches for about 30km, from south of Rize almost to Artvin at its northeastern end. Dense forest covers the lower valleys, but above 2100m grasslands carpet the passes and plateaus, and the jagged ranges are studded with lakes and alpine summer *yayla*.

The Kaçkars are popular for their trekking opportunities. Popular locations include the highest point, **Mt Kaçkar** (Kaçkar Dağı; 3937m), with a glacier on its northern face, and the northeastern ranges around the peak of **Altıparmak** (3310m). Visiting the Kaçkars on a day trip is possible, but a longer stay of at least three days will uncover the best of this beautiful region.

Activities

TREKKING

Trekking is why most travellers come to the Kaçkars, and there are innumerable walks. Talk to locals and the trekking guides.

The Kaçkars' trekking season is very short, and you can only trek the higher mountain routes between mid-July and mid-August,

and you should be able to find a guide for around TL75 per day.

A good tent, stove and sleeping bag is necessary, but you could get away with walking boots and warm clothes if you're trekking with an all-inclusive operator.

For fully guided tours, including guide fee, tents, bedding, and all transport and food, expect to pay between TL100 and TL120 per day from Ayder, depending on group size (a minimum number often applies). A one-week trek should cost around TL800.

Reliable English-speaking guides include **Mehmet Demirci** (p566; ☎ 0464-651 7787, 0533-341 3430), a friendly local entrepreneur offering day walks, longer treks, 4WD safaris, biking trips and rafting. Seven-day, six-night treks cost TL840 to TL890. Ask at **Türkü Tourism** (right) in Çamlıhemşin or the **Fora Pansiyon** (p567) in Ayder. If he's busy, Mehmet will be able to arrange another local guide.

Most pension owners will also happily help you organise a trek. There are also mountain guides in Yusufeli, Tekkale and Barhal, on the southern side of the range (see p579). Another option is to join a tour led by **Middle Earth Travel** (www.middleearthtravel.com; 1-week Kaçkar trek €460). Several treks are on offer.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

White-water rafting is possible in July and August on the rapids west of Çamlıhemşin. Ask at the hotels or at **Dağraft** (☎ 752 4070; www.dagraft.com.tr; per person TL40-70). You'll find them 9km from the coast on the Ayder to Çamlıhemşin road. Their 'Amateur Course' is a 9km Grade 1 to 2 scenic spin, but Dağraft's 'Professional Course' is an 18km Grade 3 to 4 journey all the way from Çamlıhemşin.

Rafting around Çamlıhemşin is smaller compared to the more exciting waters near Yusufeli (p578), but the Black Sea region has arguably the more impressive scenery.

Some **winter sports** such as cross-country skiing are also possible in the region, but as there are few people around outside the trekking season, this is best organised in advance. Contact Mehmet Demirci (above) for more information.

ÇAMLIHEMŞİN

☎ 0464 / pop 2400

At an altitude of 300m, 20km off the coastal road, Çamlıhemşin is definitely a climatic transition point. Mist and drizzle will flag

you've left the coastal zone, and once you start heading up the valleys towards Ayder, expect a stronger alpine influence in the climate, terrain and vegetation.

You'll pass several ancient **humpback bridges** across the Firtına Çayı (Storm Stream) which were restored for the 75th anniversary of the Turkish Republic in 1998. There are a couple of camping spots and Dağraft's (left) rafting base between here and the coast.

Çamlıhemşin is a functional village with the only **ATM** in the Kaçkars. Stock up on provisions or refuel in cheap eateries. For information and trekking arrangements, see **Türkü Tourism** (☎ 651 7230; www.turkutour.com; İnönü Caddesi 47). Ask the guys at Türkü about joining a trek to their rustic Kotençur Mountain House (2300m).

Çamlıhemşin offers basic cafés as well as **Yeşilvadi** (☎ 651 7282; İnönü Caddesi; meals TL10-14), by the Ayder bridge. It serves excellent trout dinners and mezes in its conservatory. Situated 1km along the road from Çamlıhemşin to Ayder, **Dağdibinde** (meals TL4-10) has alfresco eating beside the graceful arch of a centuries-old stone bridge. It's a top spot for a riverside beer.

Just beyond Çamlıhemşin the road forks. Straight ahead (signposted 'Zil Kale & Çat') follows the river to Şenyuva, and left (signposted 'Ayder Kaplıcaları') heads uphill to Ayder (17km).

Accommodation-wise you're best to push on to Ayder, except for one hidden gem. **Ekodanıtap** (☎ 651 7230; www.turkutour.com) is a series of four cabins concealed up a steep hill on the main road coming into Çamlıhemşin. With an organic garden and solar power, the cabins harness sustainability, but still incorporate modern features like fridges and solar showers. Meals are served in a shared pavilion overlooking a river valley. The cabins are used for week-long trekking and jeep safaris (TL960 per person) run by Türkü Tourism (above), but it's also worth phoning them to see if there's room for independent travellers.

There is no direct dolmuş from Trabzon – you'll need to go from Pazar or Ardeşen.

ŞENYUVA

☎ 0464

Şenyuva is beautiful and atmospheric. Even getting there is special, negotiating verdant valleys crisscrossed with winch wires for hoisting goods up to the remote mountain houses.

Look for the hilltop mansions built in the early 20th century when locals returned flush with cash after working as chefs and bakers in pre-Revolutionary Russia. Pension owners can organise hikes in the surrounding area.

our pick Otel Doğa (☎ 651 7455; www.hoteldogafirtina.com; half board per person TL45) is a friendly base about 4km from Çamlıhemşin. The owner İdris Duman speaks French and English, and is a passionate champion of his home region. After 25 years travelling the world as an engineer for France Telecom, he returned to build this rustic, but very comfortable, hotel on a gentle bend in the river. Most rooms have private bathrooms and balconies, and the home-cooked food is the ideal pick-me-up after a long day of walking. The hotel is popular so booking ahead is recommended. Look forward to İdris' conversational skills honed during a life well lived. During summer, dolmuşes pass by the front door heading for the villages in the Kaçkar's high meadows.

Around 2km further, in Şenyuva village, is leafy **Fırtına Pansiyon** (☎ 653 3111; pansiyon@firtinavadisi.com; half-board per person TL50; ☞ Apr-Sep), with two cute bungalows near the river and cheerful rooms in former school buildings. All accommodation has shared bathrooms.

A few hundred metres north is the graceful arch of the **Şenyuva Köprüsü** (Şenyuva Bridge,

1696). From here the road continues for 9km to the spectacularly situated ruins of **Zil Castle** (Zil Kale), a round stone tower on a stark rock base, surrounded by lush rhododendron forests. It's a superb walk, but tough-going for cars. Another 15km will lead you to **Çat** (1250m), a mountain hamlet used as a trekking base, where you'll find a shop, a couple of seasonal pensions and the start of the even rougher roads into the heart of the mountains.

Only one minibus a day runs between Şenyuva and Çamlıhemşin, so you may have to walk (6km) or take a taxi for about TL15 each way.

AYDER

☎ 0464

Ayder is the hub of tourism in the Kaçkar. This high-pasture village revels amidst a valley perched at 1300m, with snow-capped mountains above and waterfalls cascading to the river below. Earlier unregulated development saw ugly concrete buildings encroach on the glorious setting, but now charming alpine-chalet structures predominate, and new buildings must be in 'traditional style' (ie sheathed in wood).

Ayder's firmly on the agenda for Turkish tourists, and is now also becoming increasingly popular with walking groups from

MOUNTAIN MAN MEHMET

How long have you lived in the Kaçkar Mountains? I was born here and lived with my grandfather in a village 1800m up in the mountains. When I was older I went to university and then to İstanbul.

These mountains are very different from İstanbul. How did you like living in the big city? I soon realised that I had a more natural approach to life, and that I just had to come back to the Kaçkar. I came back in 1993 and was a trekking guide for five years. I then set up an eco-farm which was one the first in Turkey. In 1998 I set up Türkü Tourism (p565), and now the company's also moving into alternative tourism like our cabins at Ekodanıtıp (p565).

Tell more about Ekodanıtıp. It's got four cabins in a quiet spot near the village in Çamlıhemşin. There's solar power and an organic farm. When we're not here in Ayder during the trekking season, I stay there with my family. There are no people and I just love looking up at the solar system.

What's your favourite trek in the Kaçkar Mountains? My favourite is a week-long trek beginning in Çamlıhemşin and going up the Firtına Valley to Çat. It carries on to an altitude of 2650m, and then we descend slightly to spend three nights using the Koteçur Mountain House at 2300m as a base. Then we carry on back down to the hot springs at Ayder before returning to Çamlıhemşin.

Your son's very active. How long before he's also a trekking guide? He's only four years old, but he already comes with me sometimes. His name is Dağlar, which means 'mountain', so maybe he'll be ready next year.

Because he's so young, will trekkers get a good discount? (Laughter...)

Mehmet Demirci (46) is a trekking guide based in Ayder

HEMŞİN CULTURE

If you visit Ayder over a summer weekend you may get the chance to witness some of the last surviving Hemşin culture (see p49). In the meadows of the village, groups of Hemşin holidaymakers often gather to dance the *horon*, a cross between the conga and the hokey-cokey set to the distinctive whining skirl of the *tulum*, a type of goatskin bagpipe. Even if you don't run into one of these parties, you'll see women all around the mountains wearing splendid head-dresses, often incongruously matched with cardigans, long skirts and running shoes or woollen boots. In the second week of June many Hemşin émigrés return from overseas for the annual Çamlıhemşin Ayder Festival. Accommodation can be almost impossible to secure at this time.

Western countries, and Israel especially. As a result, Ayder's previous budget traveller ethos is creeping upmarket, eventuating in a better standard of accommodation but also slightly higher prices.

It's still really only busy during the trekking season (mid-May to mid-September) and at other times there may only be a few local families living here. But if you come in the second week of June for the annual **Çamlıhemşin Ayder Festival** (see above), or during weekends in July and August, Turkish tourists fill most accommodation by midafternoon.

Orientation & Information

About 4.5km below Ayder is the gate marking the entrance to the Kaçkar Dağları Milli Parkı (Kaçkar Mountains National Park), with an admission fee of TL8 per vehicle.

The nominal centre of the village has a few restaurants, a supermarket, an off-licence (liquor store), an internet café, the minibus office and bus stop, and several gift shops. Other accommodation, restaurants and souvenir shops are scattered for about 1km along the road uphill either side of the centre. There is nowhere to change money and the nearest ATM is in Çamlıhemşin.

Activities

Most people use Ayder as a base for **trekking** in the mountains, but even if you don't have time to do that it's still worth popping up

for an overnight stay to experience the glorious scenery. Wildlife enthusiasts should note that rare Caucasian black grouse, salamanders and brown bears all live in the national park, though it'd be a miracle to see them anywhere near the village.

Post-trek muscle relief can be had at the spotless **kaplica** (hot springs; ☎ 657 2102; admission TL6, private cabin TL25; 🕒 8am-8pm), where the water reaches temperatures of 56°C. The springs are said to be good for ulcers, skin complaints, cuts and allergies.

Sleeping

Many of Ayder's pensions are set halfway up the hill next to the road, reached by narrow, slanting paths. Getting up to them can be tricky when the mist rolls in. Usually your bags will be dragged up the hill on nifty winch arrangements.

Zirve Aşşap Pansiyon (☎ 657 2162; s/d without bathroom TL20/40) One for the budget crowd, this hillside house is pretty rustic, but there's a kitchen for guests, it's friendly and English is spoken. Breakfast costs TL6.

Otel Çağlayan (☎ 657 2073; s/d without bathroom TL20/40) Wrapped in rustic wood, this welcoming place has been around for yonks and keeps up the old Ayder tradition of good-value budget accommodation while other places in the village creep upmarket. It's around 300m uphill on your right.

Vesile Otel (☎ 657 2110; koksacolak@hotmail.com; s/d TL40/80) Marble and pine (trust us, it works) combine with a job lot of colourful kilims at this rustic spot with a few modern touches like wi-fi. Some of the rooms are a bit small and awkwardly shaped, but the terrace restaurant is a tasty bonus.

Fora Pansiyon (☎ 657 2153; www.forapansiyon.com; half-board s/d without bathroom TL45/90) Türkü Tourism's original hillside pension provides a cosy sitting room, pine-clad bedrooms with shared bathrooms, balconies and a laundry. The Demirci family are very welcoming, and dinner on the view-laden terrace with the kids shouldn't be missed. Just don't blame us if you get homesick all of a sudden. Ask here about treks, activities and visits to Türkü Tourism's Ekodanıtap cabins (p565) and Koteñçur Mountain House.

Yeşil Vadi Otel (☎ 657 2050; www.ayderyesilvadi.com, in Turkish; s/d TL50/100) Clad in more pine than a Swedish sauna, this is a good central option by the main road with rustic timber rooms, heavy

duvets and impeccable bathrooms. Many rooms boast valley views, and the restaurant out the front does a great *menemen* if you want something different for breakfast. The 'Green Valley' is also open year-round if you're planning on getting active during winter.

Kuşpuni Pansiyon (☎ 657 2052; www.kuspuni.com; s/d TL60/120) Another very appealing family-run chalet-pension, Kuşpuni revels in a stove-heated lounge with decent views and hearty meals, including a mean *muhlama*. In fact visitors rave about the food, often served on a pleasant terrace overlooking the valley. Adjacent is a pleasingly rustic *serander*.

Otel Ayder Haşimoğlu (☎ 657 2037; www.hasimogluotel.com; s/d/tr TL65/130/195) Run by Ayder Turizm, which also operates the hot springs and the Ayder Sofrası restaurant up the hill, this flash pine-clad place is absolute riverside, and 100m downhill from the centre (follow the path by the town mosque). With facilities including a fitness centre and spa, you're losing the personal, family touch available at other smaller places around town, but these are Ayder's best digs.

Ayder Turizm also rents **villas** (half-board from TL200) next to the hot springs, sleeping at least four people.

Eating & Drinking

Many people go for the half-board option at their pensions, but there are other options.

Nazlı Çiçek (☎ 657 2130; mains TL4-8) Right in the centre of the village, this charming old house specialises in freshly caught trout, but also whips up a limited range of standards and Black Sea specialities such as *muhlama*.

Çiçe Restaurant (☎ 657 2171; mains TL4-8) Next door to the Nazlı Çiçek, it plagiarises its rival's menu shamelessly, but adds live music in place of traditional decor.

Dört Mevsim (mains TL5-10) With reach-and-touch-it waterfall views straight from an advertisement for mineral water, the 'Four Seasons' is your best bet for a cold beer. The food's pretty good too, and there's a jukebox packed with Turkish pop you've probably never heard of. Turn it up loud and you might attract the *horon* dancers (see boxed text, p567) that gather occasionally in the meadow across the road. The Dört Mevsim is around 400m uphill on your right from the centre of the village.

Getting There & Away

From mid-June to mid-September frequent dolmuşes run between Pazar on the coast to Ayder (TL6, one hour) via Ardeşen and Çamlıhemşin. There are also daily direct services from Rize (TL10). On summer Sundays the trickle of minibuses up to Ayder turns into a flood. Otherwise, passengers are mostly shoppers from the villages, so dolmuşes descend in the morning and return from Pazar in the early afternoon.

In season, morning dolmuşes also run from Ayder to other mountain villages, including Galer Düzü, Avusor, Yukarı Kavron and Caymakçur. Check with locals for exact schedules.

Even in the low season there are still four minibuses daily between Pazar and Çamlıhemşin. A taxi between Ayder and Çamlıhemşin costs around TL50.

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