

Southeastern Anatolia



Turkey's wild child – southeastern Anatolia does feel different from the rest of the country, and that's part of its appeal. Apart from a few Arabic and Christian pockets, this huge chunk of territory is predominantly Kurdish.

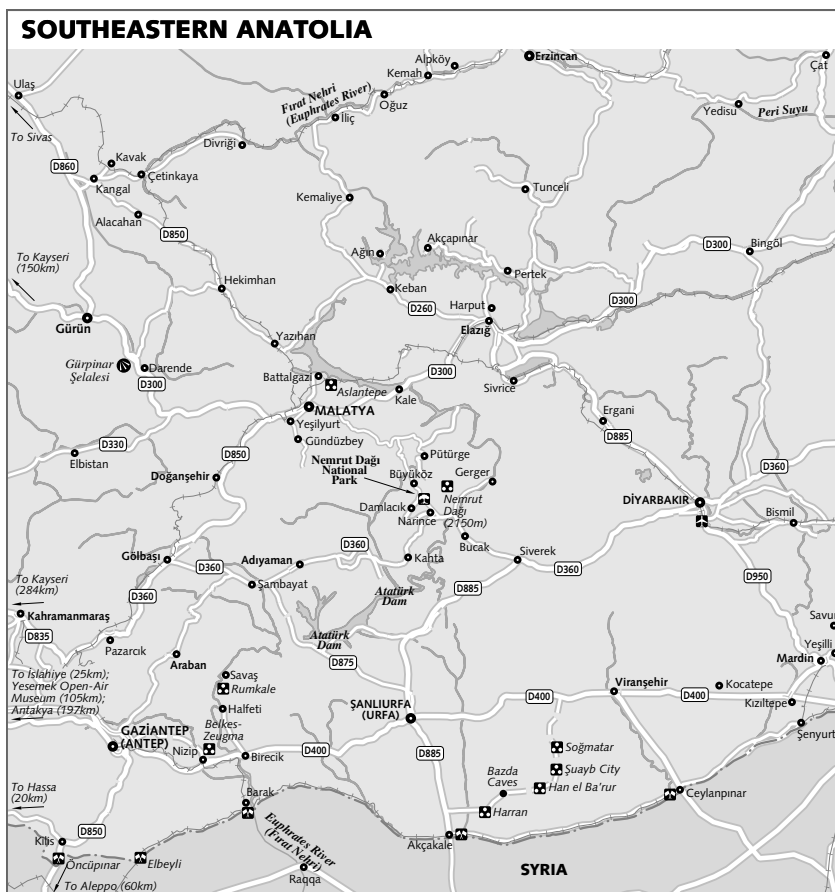
What does it have on its menu? For starters, you can choose from a wealth of historical cities, such as Mardin, the region's trophy piece, perched on a hill dominating Mesopotamia; Şanlıurfa, swathed in historical mystique; the old city of Diyarbakır, ensnared in mighty basalt walls; Bitlis, brimming with Islamic architecture; and the honey-coloured town of Hasankeyf. For main course, adjust your camera setting to 'panoramic' and shoot life-enhancing images of enigmatic Nemrut Dağı, topped with colossal ancient statues; shimmering Lake Van; or the water-filled crater of the second Nemrut Dağı, near Tatvan. And for dessert there's an array of off-the-beaten track cachet destinations, including Bahçesaray, possibly Turkey's most secluded village; Darende, a hideaway near Malatya; and a string of lovely churches around Midyat. Best of all, you can savour these sights without any tourist hustle and bustle. Oh, and southeastern Anatolia has its fair share of earthly pleasures (hmmm, pistachio baklavas...).

With all the negative coverage this area gets in the media, you are probably worried about security. Rest easy: apart from a few spots that are off-limits to foreigners (mainly along the border with Iraq), southeastern Anatolia poses very few travel challenges and most of its attractions are perfectly accessible to independent travellers. Here what will linger longest in your memory is a warm-hearted *hoş geldiniz* (welcome). So clear the slate and plunge in.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Feel elation while watching the sun set (or rise) from **Nemrut Dağı** (Mt Nemrut; p616), the 'thrones of gods'
- Go heritage-hunting among the historic buildings of **Bitlis** (p641), **Hasankeyf** (p639) and **Mardin** (p633)
- Swap stress for bliss in the perfect valley-village seclusion of **Darende** (see boxed text, p627) and **Savur** (p637)
- Fall in love with the *Gipsy Girl* and feast on culinary delights in hedonistic **Gaziantep** (p598)
- Nourish your soul in the great pilgrimage city of **Şanlıurfa** (Urfa; p607) and confess your sins in a Syriac church around **Midyat** (p638)
- Scramble all over **Van's castle** (p646) and get a rush from its lively atmosphere before touring the shores of **Lake Van** (p642)
- Catch the daily minibus to the mountain village of **Bahçesaray** (p650) – a white-knuckle ride you're unlikely to forget





KAHRAMANMARAŞ (MARAŞ)

☎ 0344 / pop 543,900

If you're heading to this neck of the woods from Cappadocia or the Mediterranean coast, a stop in Kahramanmaraş is mandatory for all ice-cream lovers. This town produces an insanely good *dövmé dondurma* (beaten ice cream), which is justly revered throughout Turkey. If you find that's not reason enough to stop here, there are a handful of cultural treasures that will keep you busy for at least a day, including the **Ulu Cami** (Atatürk Bulvarı), built in Syrian style in 1502, the hilltop **kale** (fortress) and the lively **bazaar**.

The **Hotel Belli** (☎ 223 4900; fax 214 8282; Trabzon Caddesi; s/d TL45/80; 🚽) has been refurbished and features spruce rooms and prim bathrooms.

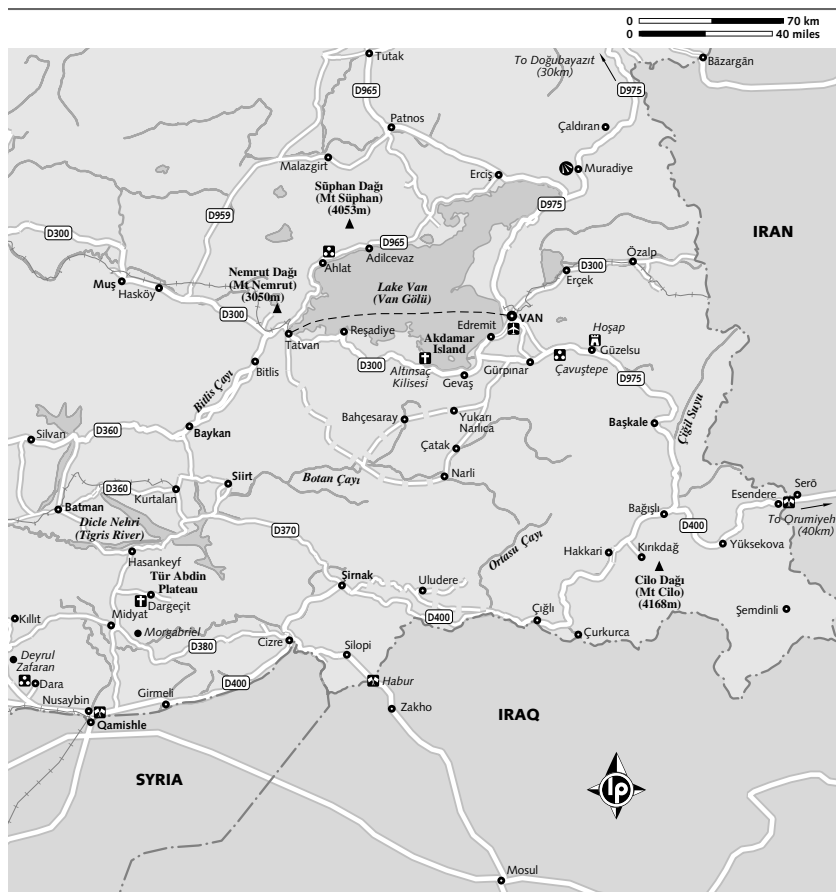
From the otogar (bus station) there are hourly minibuses to Gaziantep (TL12, two hours, 80km), while five daily buses ply the stunning route to Kayseri (TL20, 5½ hours, 291km).

GAZİANTEP (ANTEP)

☎ 0342 / pop 1,100,000

There's one Turkish word you should learn before visiting Gaziantep: *fıstık* (pistachio). This fast-paced and epicurean city is reckoned to harbour more than 180 pastry shops and to produce the best pistachio baklavas you can gobble down in Turkey, if not the world.

Antep is a greatly underrated city that proclaims a modern, laissez-faire attitude while thumbing its nose at Urfa's piety. One of the



most desirable places to live in southeastern Anatolia, it's high on ambitions, and not only in the gastronomic domain. With the biggest city park this side of the Euphrates and a buzzing café culture, Antep has lots of panache and thinks the time has come to share it with the outside world. And it also has one attraction that alone makes the trip across Turkey worth the fare: the Gaziantep Museum. Even if you've never had any enthusiasm for Roman mosaics you'll soon be a convert the minute you cast your eyes upon the *Gipsy Girl*.

The physical fabric of the city is being re-invigorated. Great monuments such as the fortress, the bazaars and a smattering of old stone houses and caravanserai are being given

the loving restorations they so richly deserve. One of southeastern Anatolia's gateways, Gaziantep has rarely been as full of confidence and hope for the future as it is today. Urfa, watch your back!

History

Before the Arabs conquered the town in AD 638, the Persians, Alexander the Great, the Romans and the Byzantines all left their imprints on the region. Proceeding from the east, the Seljuk Turks strolled into the picture around 1070.

Aintab (the former name of Gaziantep) remained a city of Seljuk culture, ruled by petty Turkish lords until the coming of the Ottomans under Selim the Grim in 1516.

GAZİANTEP (ANTEP)

SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIA

INFORMATION

Post Office..... 1 C3
Tourist Office..... 2 B3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Alaüddüvele Camii..... 3 D3
Gaziantep Museum..... 4 C2
Hasan Süzer Ethnography Museum..... 5 C3
Kale (Citadel)..... 6 C3
Kendirli Kilisesi..... 7 B3
Kurtuluş Camii..... 8 B4
Mevlevihane Vakıf Müzesi..... 9 D4
Naib Hamamı..... 10 C2
Pisirci Kasteli ve Mescidi..... 11 D4
Şıra Hanı..... 12 D4
Tahmis..... 13 D3
Tütün Hanı..... 14 D3

SLEEPING

Anadolu Evleri..... 15 D3
Dayı Ahmet Ağa Konağı..... 16 C3
Has Hotel..... 17 C3
Hotel Güllüoğlu..... 18 C3
Hotel Veliç..... 19 B3
Kale Evi..... 20 C2
Nil Hotel..... 21 B3
Yesemek Otel..... 22 C3
Yunus Hotel..... 23 C3

EATING

Baklava Ünlüler..... 24 C3
Bulvar Tavuk Döner..... 25 C3
Çavuşoğlu..... 26 D3

DRINKING

Adana Şalgamacısı - Gürbüz Usta..... 33 C3
Cafe Şehzade..... 34 C4
Kır Kahvesi..... 35 C2
Papirüs Cafeteria..... 36 C3
Tütün Hanı..... (see 14)

TRANSPORT

Buses & Dolmuşes to Otogar..... 37 C3
Buses & Dolmuşes to Otogar..... 38 C3
Minibuses for Kilis..... 39 A4
Onur Air..... 40 B3

During the Ottoman period, Aintab had a sizable Christian population, especially Armenians. You'll see Armenian churches, community buildings and mansions scattered throughout the city's historical core.

In 1920, as the victorious Allies sought to carve up the Ottoman territories, Aintab was besieged by French forces intent on adding Turkish lands to their holdings in Syria and Lebanon. Aintab's fierce nationalist defenders surrendered on 8 February 1921. The epithet 'Gazi' (War Hero) was added to Antep in 1973 to pay homage to their tenacious defence.

Orientation

The centre of this fast-growing city is the intersection of Atatürk Bulvarı and Suburcu,

Hürriyet and İstasyon Caddesi, marked by a large equestrian statue of Atatürk and still called *hükümet konağı* (government house) square.

Most essentials are within walking distance of the main intersection, including hotels, banks with ATMs, *bureaus de change*, restaurants and sights; the train station is 800m north. The otogar is about 6km from the town centre.

Information

The post office, internet cafés, most banks with ATMs and exchange offices are on or around the main square.

Arsan (☎ 220 6464; www.arsan.com.tr; Nolu Sokak; ☎ 8am-7pm) This reputable travel agency sells tickets

for domestic and international companies and can arrange various tours (from TL90 per person), including the 'Magical Triangle' (Birecik, Halfeti-Rumkale, Belkis-Zeugma), Yesemek and even Aleppo (Syria). Aysa, the helpful manager, speaks good English.

Tourist office (☎ 230 5969; 100 Yıl Atatürk Kültür Parkı İçi; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri) In a pinkish building standing in the city park, it has well-informed staff who speaks English and German. A few brochures and maps are available.

Sights

KALE DISTRICT

Get your bearings of the urban sprawl you're going to embrace by climbing up the unmissable **kale** (admission free; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun). The citadel is thought to have been constructed by the Romans. It was restored by Emperor Justinian in the 6th century AD, and rebuilt extensively by the Seljuks in the 12th and 13th centuries.

Restoration, restoration, restoration. The quarter at the foot of the citadel has been entirely revamped over the last few years, and old shops and workshops have been modernised. Needless to say, they have lost much of their character in the process. Immediately north of the citadel, check out the elegant proportions of the **Naib Hamamı** (Kale Arası) before heading south to the partially covered **bazaar** area, which includes Zincirli Bedesten. Much of it has been recently restored, too. Continuing south, make a beeline for the well-organised **Mevlevihane Vakıf Müzesi** (☎ 232 9797; Tekke Camii Yanı; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), which focuses on the Mevlevi Sufis (a dervish order), with various artworks, kilims (pileless woven rugs), manuscripts, clothing worn by Mevlevi and other dervish paraphernalia. Panels are in English. Also worth a peek are the **Şıra Hanı**, another restored caravanserai, and the **Pişirici Kasteli ve Mescidi** (Şehitler Caddesi), which harbours ancient underground ablutions blocks.

If you need a coffee break, try to find **Tahmis** (Buğdaypazarı Sokak), possibly the most atmospheric *kahvehane* (coffeehouse) in Gaziantep, and on a par with the more institutionalised **Tütün Hanı** (Eski Saray Caddesi Yanı), set in a restored caravanserai right in the heart of the bazaar.

GAZİANTEP MUSEUM & ZEUGMA KÜLTÜR VE MÜZE MERKEZİ

Even if the idea of an archaeology museum would usually send you off to sleep, the **Gaziantep Museum** (☎ 324 8809; İstasyon Caddesi; admis-

sion TL2; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun) will amaze you with its collection of the many mosaics unearthed at the rich Roman site of Belkis-Zeugma, just before the new Birecik Dam flooded some of the site forever. It's impossible not to fall in love with the *Gipsy Girl*, from the 2nd century AD, the museum's highlight. Also make a beeline for the famous *Scene of Achilles being sent to the Trojan War*.

All the mosaics are due to be transferred to a new museum called Zeugma Kültür ve Müze Merkezi, which should have opened by the time you read this. The current museum will focus on archaeology only.

HASAN SÜZER ETHNOGRAPHY MUSEUM

Occupying a restored two-century-old Gaziantep stone house tucked away in a side street off Atatürk Caddesi, the **Hasan Süzer Ethnography Museum** (admission TL2; Hanefioğlu Sokak; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) is well worth a visit. A central *hayat* (courtyard) patterned with light and dark stone provides light and access to the rooms. Those on the ground floor were for service; those on the 1st floor made up the selamlık (quarters for male family members and their visitors); and those on the 2nd floor made up the *haremlık* (for female family members and their visitors).

100 YIL ATATÜRK KÜLTÜR PARKI

If you're all market-ed and museum-ed out, the **100 Yıl Atatürk Kültür Parkı** (admission free), within spitting distance of Gaziantep's traffic-snarled main thoroughfares, is a lovely space in the middle of the city and provides a green haven for nature lovers, families and courting 20-somethings.

KENDİRLİ KİLİSESİ

Wedged between modern buildings smack in the centre, this **church** (Atatürk Bulvarı) is a startling vision. It was constructed by French priests with the help of Napoleon III in 1860. Seen from a distance, the building looks quite featureless, but a closer inspection reveals a number of eye-catching decorative elements, including black-and-white medallions.

MOSQUES

Of Gaziantep's many mosques, the most impressive is the **Kurtuluş Camii**, built on a small hill off the main drag. Initially constructed as a cathedral in 1892, it features alternating black-and-white stone banding. Another mosque

worth admiring is the **Alaüddeve Camii**, near the Coppersmiths' Market.

Sleeping

Gaziantep is rolling in accommodation, much of it on or near Suburcu, Hürriyet and Atatürk Caddesi.

BUDGET

Yunus Hotel (☎ 221 1722; hoteleyunus@hotmail.com; Kayacak Sokak; s/d TL30/50; 🏠) As far as physical beauty goes, this a real plain Jane, but it's a secure spot to hang your rucksack, the rates are good and it's handily set in the centre of town. It features anodyne rooms with well-scrubbed bathrooms (but please, upgrade the boarding school-style furnishings). The breakfast room is windowless.

Hotel Veliç (☎ 221 2212; www.velicotel.com; Atatürk Bulvarı; s/d TL35/55; 🏠) A recent lick of paint (yellow and lilac) in the rooms and the communal areas has elevated this concrete lump on the main drag a couple of notches on the comfort ladder. The rooms are a bit on the small side, though (check out a few before committing). Top marks go to the bright top-floor breakfast area – the perfect spot to eye up the city.

Hotel Güllüoğlu (☎ 232 4636; fax 220 8689; Suburcu Caddesi; s/d TL40/60; 🏠) The decor's a bit blah and the carpets are tatty, but the bathrooms are kept in fine fettle and location is primo. Oh, and there's the Güllüoğlu pastry shop on the ground floor.

MIDRANGE

Has Hotel (☎ 232 8882; info@hotelhas.com; Suburcu Caddesi; s/d TL40/70; 🏠) If fancy decor is not the issue but hygiene, location and solid amenities are high on your list, then the newish Has could be worth it. It offers well-appointed rooms with TV, darkwood furnishings, minibar, prim bathrooms and well-sprung mattresses. As with nearby Güllüoğlu, there's a bit of street noise but nothing to lose sleep over. And as with the Güllüoğlu, you can sate a sweet tooth on the ground floor – at the Has Simit Evi.

Nil Hotel (☎ 220 9452; fax 220 9965; Atatürk Bulvarı; s/d TL40/70; 🏠) There's nothing overly adventurous in this small 'high-rise' hotel, but what do you want from a middle-of-the-road establishment? At least the bathrooms are sanitary and it's high on facilities, with satellite TV, air-con, lift and car park – not to mention a central location.

Yesemek Otel (☎ 220 8888; www.yesemekotel.com; İsmail Sokak; s/d TL50/70; 🏠) Come across the modern exterior and imposing lobby and you could easily mistake Yesemek for a bank. Bang in the thick of things, this well-regarded pile offers great service and facilities, including a restaurant and a private *otopark* (car park) just next door, although its executive look doesn't really scream holidays.

TOP END

Kale Evi (☎ 231 4142; www.kaleevi.com; Köprübaşı Sokak; s/d TL100/150; 🏠) This newish eight-room hotel aims to offer a boutique stay for less, but gets sidetracked by a few tacky touches – such as huge air-conditioners and cheesy bedspreads in the rooms, or a mock fresco of the *Gypsy Girl* in the restaurant. At least it's cosy and the location is ace – it clings like a limpet to a section of the citadel.

our pick **Anadoluevleri** (☎ 220 9525, 0533-558 7996; www.anadoluevleri.com; Köroğlu Sokak; s/d TL105/135, 1-2-person ste TL135/170; 🏠 📺) A tastefully restored old stone house in a lovely position that provides the perfect soft landing into Gaziantep. This oasis celebrates local tradition: a beguiling courtyard, beamed or painted ceilings, mosaic floors, secret passageways, and antique furniture and artefacts. It's within spitting distance of the bustling bazaar, yet it feels quiet and restful. No two rooms are identical. Rooms 1 and 2, on the ground floor, are a tad sombre, but the other 11 rooms, including three gleaming suites, get plenty of natural light. Your host, Timur Schindel, rules his kingdom with relaxed bonhomie and will give you the low-down on all that's worth seeing in the city, in perfect English.

Dayı Ahmet Ağa Konakı (☎ 232 1626; www.dayi Ahmetagakonagi.com; Eski Postane Sokak; s/d TL110/150; 🏠) An air of mystery and romance lingers around this historic *konak* (mansion) refurbished in 2008. The eight rooms feel like cocoons, with rugs, wood panels and parquet flooring (pity about the bulky air-conditioners, though), and there's an on-site restaurant (yes, it's licensed). It's incredibly central, but still feels like a personal sanctuary.

Eating

Food, glorious food! Gaziantep is a nirvana for gourmands, with a prodigious selection of eateries and pastry shops to suit all palates and budgets. For a cheap meal on the go at

lunchtime, try one of the numerous *dönerci* on Suburcu Caddesi or Gaziler Caddesi.

Çavuşoğlu (☎ 231 3069; Eski Saray Caddesi; mains TL4-8) Partly *baklavacı* (see boxed text, below), partly *kebabçı*, this sprightly outfit rustles up dishes that will fill your tummy without emptying your wallet. Portions are copious, the meat is perfectly slivered and the salads are fresh.

ourpick İmam Çağdaş (☎ 231 2678; Kale Cıvırı Uzun Çarşı; mains TL4-10) This talismanic pastry shop and restaurant is run by İmam Çağdaş, our culinary guru, who concocts wicked pistachio baklava that are delivered daily to customers throughout Turkey. If there were a kebab Oscar, this place would be a serious contender. The secret? Fresh, carefully chosen ingredients and the inimitable 'Çağdaş touch' (see boxed text, below). If you want to whet your appetite before your trip, check out www.imamcagdas.com.

Çınarlı (☎ 221 2155; Çınarlı Sokak; mains TL4-11) Resisting the passage of time, the Çınarlı still enjoys a great reputation for its *yöresel yemek*s (traditional dishes), a perfect excuse to experiment with lesser-known dishes such as *ekşili ufak köfte*, *yuvarlama* or *kuruluk dolma*. The decor works a treat, with three small rooms decorated with rugs, weapons and other collectibles, as well as a bigger dining room upstairs where you can enjoy live music in the

afternoon. It's a pistachio's toss from the war memorial (walk down the stairs).

Çulcuoğlu Et Lokantası (☎ 231 0241; Kalender Sokak; mains TL5-10; ☎ 11.30am-10pm Mon-Sat) Surrender helplessly to your inner carnivore at this Gaziantep institution. The yummy kebabs are the way to go, but grilled chicken also puts in menu appearances. Don't be fooled by the unremarkable entrance; there's a vast, neat dining area at the back. It's tucked away down a narrow side street across the *otopark* from the Şıra Hanı, about 20m from a little mosque called Nur Ali.

Metanet Lokantası (Kozluca Camii Yanı; mains TL6-8; ☎ lunch) Left, right, left again. That's it, over there. The sort of place you only find if you go looking for it. Tucked away in a side street near Kozluca Camii, the Metanet has always been part of the local knowledge. The moustached waiters, who seem to have been a fixture here for decades, conscientiously mince the meat around noon in front of a big grill. *Ayrın* (yoghurt drink) is served in a tin bowl, and the atmosphere is convivial. Much less institutionalised than İmam Çağdaş.

Mado Café (☎ 221 1500; Atatürk Bulvarı; mains TL7-9) Young couples... Ladies with bare arms (almost an anomaly in eastern Turkey)... Young businessmen working on their computers... The super-slick Mado is *the* place to meet Gaziantep's movers and shakers in a mart

GAZİANTEP FOR THE SWEET TOOTH

For any baklava (layered filo pastries with honey and nuts) devotee, Gaziantep is a Shangri-la. The city is reckoned to produce the best *fıstıklı* (pistachio) baklavas in Turkey, if not in the world. When they are served ultrafresh, you'll lose all self-control (trust us). With more than 180 pastry shops scattered around the city, it's hard to determine which is the best, but some baklava shops have reached cult status, such as **Güllüoğlu** (☎ 231 2282; Suburcu Caddesi), **Çavuşoğlu** (☎ 231 3069; Eski Saray Caddesi), **Baklava Ünlüleri** (☎ 232 2043; Suburcu Caddesi), **Fıstıkzade** (☎ 336 0020; Fevzi Çakmak Bulvarı) and the talismanic **İmam Çağdaş** (☎ 231 2678; Kale Cıvırı Uzun Çarşı). Baklava purists swear İmam Çağdaş is the ultimate, but on our last trip we also made ourselves a nuisance at Güllüoğlu. If you find other treasure troves, we'll be happy to learn about your experience.

We asked Burhan Çağdaş the owner of the eponymous İmam Çağdaş, which has been tormenting carb-lovers since 1887, what the qualities of a perfectly crafted baklava are. 'I carefully choose the freshest ingredients imaginable. Everything is organic. I know the best oil and pistachio producers in the Gaziantep area. The nature of the soil here gives a special aroma to pistachio. And we don't go into mass production.' We also asked another expert, Sedat Kirişçi, the owner of Fıstıkzade and a former *usta* (master) at Güllüoğlu, how long it takes to become a baklava chef. '*Yirmi yıl*' (20 years) – you get the picture. To get addicted, it takes just a moment on the lips...

How can one judge whether a baklava is fresh? 'It's simple: when it's in your mouth, it should make like a *kshhhh* sound,' says Burhan Çağdaş. He's right. You'll never forget the typical *kshhhh* that characterises a fresh baklava when it titillates your taste buds. Stop, we're drooling over the keyboard!

setting (contemporary furnishings, muted lighting, comfortable seating, big-screen TV). You can nosh on snacks and sip fruity cocktails, but the pastries and the ice creams are what make the place tick.

Baro Lokali (☎ 339 4140; 100 Yıl Atatürk Kültür Parkı; mains TL7-10) It's the setting that's the pull here, with an enchanting leaf-dappled outdoor terrace, at the western end of the 100 Yıl Atatürk Kültür Parkı (about TL6 by taxi) – perfect for escaping sticky Gaziantep on a hot summer day. Good choice of mezes and meat dishes. You can order beer, rakı (aniseed brandy) or wine with your meal.

Other temptations in the centre:

Bulvar Tavuk Döner (İstasyon Caddesi; mains TL2-4) If money matters, this sprightly little joint is the ideal pit stop (only TL2 for a chicken sandwich).

Has Simit Evi (Suburcu Caddesi; simits from TL2) This humming venue adjoining the Has Hotel churns out *simits* (bread rings sprinkled with sesame seeds) that will leave you a drooling mess.

Önder Lahmacun Salonu (☎ 231 6455; Eyüboğlu Caddesi; pide from TL4) Turkish pizzas never tasted so good in this modern eatery situated a short bag-haul from Kurtuluş Camii.

Drinking

Cafe Şehzade (☎ 231 0350; Gaziler Caddesi; snacks TL2-4; ☎ 8.30am-8pm) The decor alone is worth a gander: the atmospheric Şehzade is housed in an 800-year-old converted hamam (bath-house). The food, mostly snacks, is so-so, but it's a good place to meet students and sip a cup of tea. Drop by late afternoon, when there's live music.

Adana Şalgamacısı – Gürbüz Usta (Hürriyet Caddesi; juices from TL2) See the heaps of grapefruit, banana and orange on the counter at this buzzing hole-in-the-wall? They're just waiting to be squeezed. Try the delicious *atom* (an explosive mixture of milk, honey, banana, hazelnut and pistachio).

Kir Kahvesi (Köprübaşı Sokak; Turkish coffee TL4) This newish café in an overrestored historic building at the foot of the citadel lacks the patina and atmosphere of the Papirüs, but it's still a good place to recuperate after visiting the area.

Tütün Hanı (Eski Saray Caddesi Yanı) Set in the picturesque courtyard of the recently restored Tütün Hanı, this teahouse is a great place to enjoy a cheap tea and nargileh (traditional water pipe). It has bags of character, featuring rugs, low wooden tables and cushions.

ourpick Papirüs Cafeteria (☎ 230 3279; Neter Sokak) What a find! A student crowd (male and female, we promise) gathers here to take advantage of the delightfully authentic setting – it's housed in a historic mansion off Atatürk Caddesi – and swap numbers in the leafy courtyard. Don't miss the ancient frescoes in the upstairs rooms.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Gaziantep's Oğuzeli airport is 20km from the centre. An airport bus departs from outside each airline office 1½ hours before flights (TL5).

Cyprus Turkish Airlines (www.kthy.net) Four weekly flights to Ercan (Northern Cyprus), from TL275 return (one hour). Has also a weekly flight to London-Stansted.

Onur Air (www.onurair.com.tr) Daily flight to/from İstanbul (from TL59, 1¼ hours).

Pegasus (www.flypgs.com) Four weekly flights to/from İstanbul (from TL59).

Sun Express (www.sunexpress.com.tr) Four weekly flights to/from İzmir (from TL59, 1¼ hours).

Turkish Airlines (www.thy.com) Three to four daily flights to/from İstanbul (from TL100, 1¼ hours) and to/from Ankara (from TL59).

Any travel agency in Gaziantep, including Arsan (see p600), can issue tickets on behalf of these companies.

BUS

The otogar is 6km from the town centre. Frequent city buses (TL1) rattle between the otogar and the centre. To get to the otogar, catch a bus or minibus in Hürriyet Caddesi, north of Gaziler Caddesi, or in İstasyon Caddesi, about 400m further north. A taxi costs about TL13.

There's no direct bus to Syria; you'll have to go to Kilis first, then take a taxi to the border or to Aleppo. Minibuses to Kilis (TL6, 65km) leave every 20 minutes or so from a separate *garaj* (minibus terminal) on İnönü Caddesi. Minibuses to Birecik (TL7, 46km) leave from the otogar.

Details of some daily services are listed in the table, opposite.

CAR

You may need a car to see the surrounding sights, especially Yesemek Open-Air Museum (opposite). Arsan (p600) can arrange car rental at no extra cost. Plan on TL80 a day.

SERVICES FROM GAZİANTEP'S OTOGAR

Destination	Fare (TL)	Duration (hr)	Distance (km)	Frequency (per day)
Adana	12	4	220	frequent buses
Adıyaman	12	3	162	frequent minibuses
Ankara	40	10	705	frequent buses
Antakya	12	4	200	frequent minibuses
Diyarbakır	20	5	330	frequent buses
Istanbul	50	15	1136	several buses
Kahramanmaraş	12	1½	80	frequent buses & minibuses
Mardin	25	6	330	several buses
Şanlıurfa	12	2½	145	frequent buses
Van	30	12	740	several buses

TRAIN

The comfortable *Toros Ekspresi* leaves for İstanbul via Adana and Konya at 2.30pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday (TL40, 27 hours). To get to Aleppo and Damascus by train, you'll need to go to İslahiye to catch the twice-weekly train to Syria.

AROUND GAZİANTEP

Kilis

☎ 0348 / pop 70,700

Architecture buffs should not miss Kilis, which is easily accessible from Gaziantep. Kilis bristles with lovely ancient buildings scattered around the city centre, including mausoleums, caravanserais, hamams, mosques, fountains, *konaks*... Mosey around the narrow streets off the main drag and you'll find them all, some recently restored. On or around the main square, look for the superb Adliye, the Mevlevi Hane, the Tekye Camii, the Paşa Hamamı and the Kadı Camii. The Cuneyne Camii and the Çalılık Camii are a bit more difficult to find (ask around).

Take a minibus from Gaziantep and allow a day in this surprising city to do it justice. Should you want to stay overnight here, the **Mer-Tur Otel** (☎ 814 0834; mer-turotel@hotmail.com; Zekerya Korkmaz Bulvarı; s/d TL55/80; 🍷) is a commendable haunt, although it won't knock your socks off. If you need to sate a sweet tooth, there's an ice-cream parlour on the ground floor.

There are frequent minibus services to Gaziantep (TL6, 65km, one hour). For Aleppo in Syria, take a taxi to Öncüpinar at the border (TL10, 7km). From the Syrian side of the border, you can pick up a taxi for Aleppo.

Yesemek Open-Air Museum

One of the star attractions in the Gaziantep area is the **Yesemek Open-Air Museum** (Yesemek Açık

Hava Müzesi; admission TL2; ☒ dawn-dusk), a vast hillside studded with some 300 Hittite stones and statues. Even if you're not a fan of the Hittites, you will find a visit rewarding, if only for the picturesque setting.

The use of the site is intriguing. From around 1375 BC this hillside was a Hittite quarry and sculpture workshop. For over 600 years it churned out basalt blocks, weighing anywhere from 1.5 to 8 tonnes, that were carved into lions, sphinxes and other designs. Today, the pieces are left in various states of completion, abandoned at the end of the Hittite era.

Yesemek is a long 113km haul from Gaziantep. Getting there by public transport is a chore, because there's no direct service. It's easier to hire a car in Gaziantep. You could do a scenic loop, taking in Kilis, Yesemek and İslahiye. From Kilis, follow the D410 to Hassa/Antakya, then bear right onto the gravel road marked for Yesemek.

Belkis-Zeugma

The city of Belkis-Zeugma was once an important city. Founded by one of Alexander the Great's generals around 300 BC, it had its golden age with the Romans, and later became a major trading station along the Silk Road. Unfortunately, it has lost much of its appeal since most of the site disappeared beneath the waters of the Birecik Dam. Most interesting mosaics and finds have been transferred to Gaziantep Museum (p601), where some are on display. All that is left of the city's former grandeur is a pile of rubble and a couple of dilapidated pillars. Nor are there any explanatory signs. There are plans for an open-air museum to give the site a bit more lustre – stay tuned.

The site is about 50km from Gaziantep and 10km from Nizip, off the main road to Şanlıurfa (it's signposted from Nizip), but there's no minibus service. If you don't have your own vehicle, you may think it's too much effort getting there for too little reward.

Birecik

If birdwatching gets you chirpy, make a bee-line for Birecik, about 46km east of Gaziantep, right by the Euphrates River (Firat Nehri). This unimposing town harbours a breeding station for the eastern bald ibis (*Geronticus eremita*), a bird species that, sadly, hovers on the brink of extinction. The birds are tagged, released into the wild, and are only supposed to be here during the breeding season (February to July), but you can usually see at least a few of them all year-round. Photographers take note: you'll need a 400mm lens – the nest boxes are set up in the cliff.

Birecik is also the main launching pad for Halfeti (see right).

With your own vehicle, getting to the breeding station is reasonably simple. From the main bridge, follow the riverbank north for about 2km looking out on the right for the signs marked Kelaynak Parkı and **Birecik Kelaynak Üretme İstasyonu** (Birecik Ibis Breeding Station; ☎ 7am-7pm).

If feathered creatures are not your thing, you can visit the ruins of the **fortress** perched on the hill.

If you get stuck in Birecik, **Hotel Acar** (☎ 0414-652 8885; İskele Çarşısı; s/d TL45/80; 🍷) is the best shut-eye option. It's conveniently located near the vegetable market and the Halfeti minibus stop. The 15 rooms are fresh, clean and serviceable, and some have views of the Euphrates. If hunger beckons, the welcoming and immaculate **Altın Sofra** (☎ 0414-652 6476; İskele Çarşısı; mains TL5-10) is on the ground floor (same management). Its *çiğ köfte* (raw minced mutton) and *kaşarlı pide* (pide with cheese) are flavoursome.

Any of the buses travelling between Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep can drop you at Birecik. At Birecik ask to be let off at the *köprü* (bridge), by the river. Then you'll have to walk 2km to the breeding station or hire a taxi.

The small otogar near the vegetable market, by the river, at the foot of the fortress, handles minibuses to Gaziantep (TL7, one hour). Minibuses for Halfeti (TL3, 45km) leave from near the Hotel Acar, on the other side of the vegetable market. There are regular minibuses

on weekdays, but very few services at weekends. A taxi ride to Halfeti costs about TL50. Minibuses to Şanlıurfa (TL10, 1½ hours) leave from a *durak* (bus stop) that is under the bridge, on the road that skirts the river. Or you can go to the main otogar, which is inconveniently positioned at the eastern fringe of Birecik, on the road to Şanlıurfa.

Halfeti & Rumkale

If you need a break in a more secluded place, then Halfeti is for you. This peaceful village lies about 40km north of Birecik, right on the bank of the Euphrates. It's the perfect spot to unwind before tackling the busy cities of Şanlıurfa to the east or Gaziantep to the west. The setting couldn't be more appealing, with attractive houses that trip down the hillside above the river. Sadly, construction of the Birecik Dam meant that half of the city, including several archaeological sites, was inundated and part of the population had to be resettled.

There are several places to soak up the atmosphere along the river while noshing on fresh fish. The leafy **Siyah Gül Restaurant** (☎ 0414-751 5235; mains TL6-9), overlooking the river, is a sound option and alcohol is served. The licensed **Duba Restaurant** (☎ 0414-751 5704; mains TL6-10), at the end of the village (just go along the road that follows the river), is also worth considering, with a purpose-built pontoon on the water and a teensy *bahçe* (garden). Other eateries have recently opened up but their locations are not that fantastic. Should you decide to stay overnight, the welcoming **Şelaleli Konak** (☎ 0414-751 5500; d per person TL20) fits the bill, but there are only three rooms (one with private bathroom). The owner of the Siyah Gül Restaurant has a room for rent in his house.

From Halfeti, boat trips to **Rumkale** can easily be organised (about TL40 for the whole boat) – a definite must-do. The boat putt-putts along the river for about 20 minutes until it reaches the base of the rocky bluff on top of which sits this ruined fortress. The fortress is accessible by a short but steep path (be careful if you are with children). It features a mosque, a church, a monastery, a well and other remains, all in a relatively good state of preservation. And, man-oh-man, the views of the Euphrates valley are just wonderful. Back at your boat, ask the driver to continue until **Savaş**, another partly inundated village, a mere 10 minutes' boat ride from Rumkale. There's

GAP – THE SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIA PROJECT

The character of the landscape in southeastern Anatolia is changing as the Southeast Anatolia Project (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi), better known as GAP or Güneydoğu, comes online, bringing irrigation waters to large arid regions and generating enormous amounts of hydroelectricity for industry. Parched valleys have become fish-filled lakes, and dusty villages are becoming booming market towns and factory cities.

The scale of the project is awe-inspiring, affecting eight provinces and two huge rivers (the Tigris and the Euphrates). In 2008, 17 dams (out of a planned total of 22) had been completed.

Such a huge, hope-generating project can also generate sizable problems, especially ecological and sanitary ones, due to the change from dry to wet agriculture. According to data from the Malaria Division of the Turkish Health Ministry, the reported cases of malaria rose from 8680 in 1990 to 18,676 in 1992.

The project has also generated political problems, as Syria and Iraq, the countries downriver for whom the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates are also vital, complain bitterly that Turkey is using or keeping a larger share of the water than it should. Innumerable archaeological sites have also disappeared under dam water, or are slated to do so.

limited infrastructure in Savaş but nothing beats a cup of çay (tea) in one of the little tea gardens by the river.

Halfeti is relatively easily accessible by public transport on weekdays. Hourly minibuses ply the route between Birecik and Halfeti (TL3).

ŞANLIURFA (URFA)

☎ 0414 / pop 463,800 / elevation 518m

After the secular pleasures of Antep (and the subsequent crisis of faith), it's time to exercise your soul in mystical and pious Şanlıurfa (the Prophets' City; also known as Urfa), a spiritual centre par excellence and great pilgrimage town. This is where the prophets Job and Abraham left their marks. As has been the case with centuries of pilgrims before you, the first sight of the Dergah complex of mosques and the holy Gölbaşı area (with the call to prayer as a soundtrack) will be a magical moment that you will remember for a long time to come.

It's also in Urfa that you begin to feel you've reached the Middle East, courtesy of its proximity to Syria. Women cloaked in black chadors elbow their way through the odorous crush of the bazaar streets; moustached gents in şalvar (traditional baggy Arabic pants) swill tea and click-clack backgammon pieces in shady courtyards; pilgrims feed sacred carp in the shadows of a medieval fortress... If you're after touches of exoticism, you'll be amply rewarded here.

Sadly, the modern town is a fairly utilitarian collection of apartment blocks and con-

crete eyesores, and out on the highway the traffic is noisy. Despite its few shortcomings, Urfa is a place to lock onto your travel radar and deserves at least a couple of days to see all the sights and soak up the atmosphere of the back streets.

History

The Hittites imposed their rule over the area around 1370 BC. After a period of Assyrian rule, Alexander the Great hit Urfa. He and his Macedonian mates named the town Edessa, after a former capital of Macedonia, and it remained the capital of a Seleucid province until 132 BC, when the local Aramaean population set up an independent kingdom and renamed the town Orhai. Orhai finally succumbed to the Romans, as did everywhere hereabouts.

Edessa pursued its contrary history by speedily adopting Christianity (c 200) before it became the official religion of the conquerors.

Astride the fault line between the Persian and Roman empires, control of Edessa was batted back and forth from one to the other. In 533 the two empires signed a Treaty of Endless Peace – that lasted seven years. The Romans and Persians kept at it until the Arabs swept in and cleared them all out in 637. Edessa enjoyed three centuries of peace under the Arabs, after which everything went to blazing again.

Turks, Arabs, Armenians and Byzantines battled for the city from 944 until 1098, when the First Crusade under Count Baldwin of Boulogne arrived to set up the Latin County of

ŞANLIURFA (URFA)

0 400 m
0 0.2 miles

A

B

C

D

INFORMATION

Harran-Nemrut Tours.....	1	C4
Nedim Döviz.....	2	C3
Özel Dünya Hastanesi.....	3	C4
Post Office.....	4	C4

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Arasa Hamamı.....	5	B5
Bedesten (Kazaz Pazarı).....	6	B6
Gümrük Hanı.....	7	B5
Güzel Sanatlar Galerisi.....	8	C4
Halilur Rahman Camii.....	9	A6
Hasan Padişah Camii.....	10	B6
Hazreti İbrahim Halilullah.....	11	B6
Hüseyin Paşa Camii.....	12	C4
İl Özel İdaresi Kültür Ve Sanat Merkezi.....	13	C5
İlkoğretim Okulu.....	14	C5
Kale (Citadel).....	15	B6
Mevlid-i Halil Camii.....	16	B6
Rizvaniye Vakfı Camii & Medresesi.....	17	B6
Şanlıurfa Museum.....	18	B3

SLEEPING

Beyzade Konak.....	22	C4
Cevahir Konuk Evi.....	23	B5
Gülizar Konuk Evi.....	(see 38)	
Hotel Arte.....	24	C3
Hotel Bakay.....	25	B4
Hotel Edessa & Narlı Evi.....	26	B6
Hotel El-Ruha.....	27	A5
Hotel Güven.....	(see 31)	
Hotel Harran.....	28	C3
Hotel İpek Palas.....	29	C4
Hotel Rabis.....	30	C4
Otel Doğu.....	31	C4

EATING

Baklavacı Badıllı Dedeoğlu.....	32	C4
Beyzade Konak.....	(see 22)	
Birlik Pastanesi.....	33	C4

Büyükfırat.....	34	C4
Çardaklı Köşk.....	35	A5
Cevahir Konuk Evi.....	(see 23)	
Çift Mağara.....	36	B6
Gülhan Restaurant.....	37	C3
Gülizar Konuk Evi.....	38	B4
Hacıbaba Kadayıfı.....	39	C4
Pınarbaşı Konağı.....	40	B5
Zahter Kahvaltı & Kebap Salonu.....	(see 33)	

DRINKING

Çay Bahçesi (Tea Gardens).....	41	B6
--------------------------------	----	----

TRANSPORT

Dolmuş To Prophet Job's Site.....	42	C5
Kalınur Turizm Seyahat Acentesi.....	(see 44)	
Otogar & Minibus Terminal.....	43	A4
Türkish Airlines.....	44	C4

1

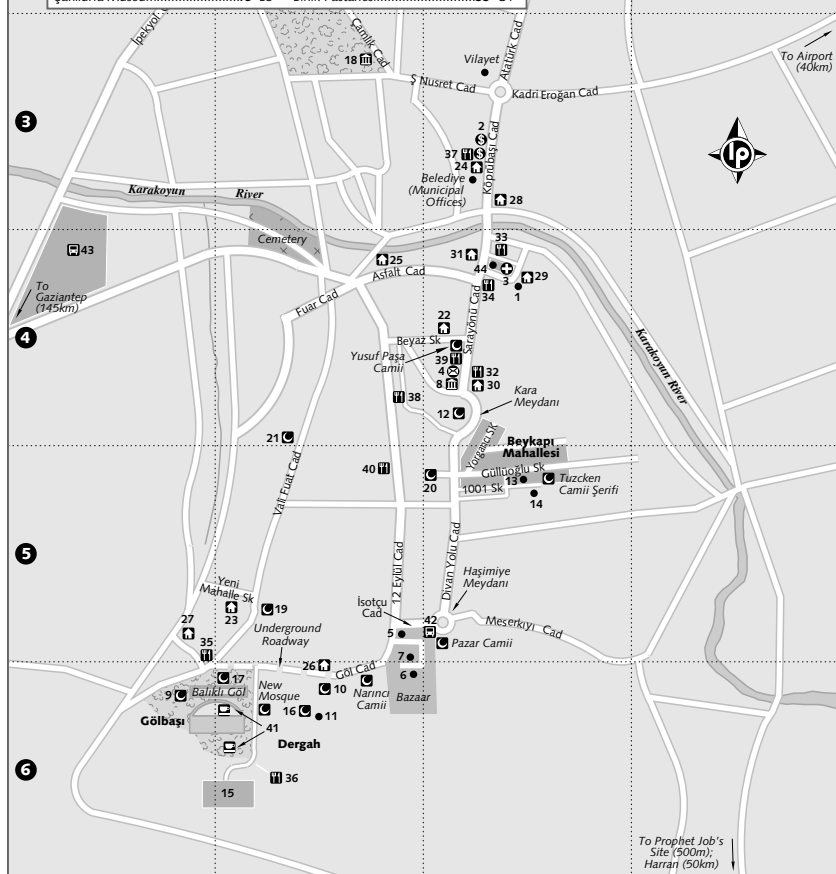
2

3

4

5

6



Edessa. This odd European feudal state lasted until 1144 when it was conquered by a Seljuk Turkish *emir* (tribal leader).

The Seljuk Turkish *emir* was succeeded by Saladin, then by the Mamluks. The Ottomans, under Selim the Grim, conquered most of this region in the early 16th century, but Edessa did not become Urfa until 1637 when the Ottomans finally took over.

As for its modern sobriquet, Urfa became Şanlıurfa (Glorious Urfa) in 1984. Since 1973, when Heroic Antep (Gaziantep) was given its special name, the citizens of Urfa had been chafing under a relative loss of dignity. Now that their city is 'Glorious', the inhabitants can look the citizens of 'Heroic' Antep straight in the eye.

Orientation

Except for inside the bazaar, it's fairly easy to find your way around Urfa. You'll see the citadel to the right as you enter the town along the highway from Gaziantep. The otogar is about 1km from the centre (but probably will be relocated out of town in the near future).

Along different stretches the city's main thoroughfare is called Atatürk, Köprübaşı, Sarayönü and Divan Yolu Caddesi.

Information

The post office, internet cafés and most banks with ATMs are on or near the main drag.

Harran-Nemrut Tours (☎ 215 1575, 0542-761 3065;

ozcan_aslan_teacher@hotmail.com; Köprübaşı Caddesi;

☎ 8.30am-6pm) In the absence of a tourist office, this small travel agency is the most reliable source of information. It's efficiently run by Özcan Aslan, a local teacher, who speaks very good English and is a mine of local information. He runs tours to nearby sites, including Harran, Şuayb City, Soğmatar, Mardin and Nemrut Dağı, sells bus and flight tickets (at no extra costs) and can arrange car rental. It's just behind the Özel Dünya Hastanesi.

Nedim Döviz (☎ 312 7070; Köprübaşı Caddesi;

☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) Private exchange office. Keeps longer hours than the banks. No queues.

Özel Dünya Hastanesi (☎ 216 2772; Köprübaşı Caddesi) A well-equipped private hospital.

Sights

CITADEL

With an astounding view, the **kale** (admission TL2; ☎ 8am-8pm) on Damlacık hill, from which Abraham was supposedly tossed (see right), is a defining city landmark and an absolute

must-see. Depending upon where you go for your information, it was built during Hellenistic times or by the Byzantines or during the Crusades or by the Turks. In any case, it's vast, looks magnificent when floodlit and can be reached via a flight of stairs or a tunnel cut through the rock. On the top, the most interesting things are the pair of columns that local legend has dubbed the Throne of Nemrut after the supposed founder of Urfa, the biblical King Nimrod. But really, you come up here for the spectacular views over Urfa.

GÖLBAŞI

Legend had it that Abraham (İbrahim), who is a great Islamic prophet, was in old Urfa destroying pagan gods one day when Nimrod, the local Assyrian king, took offence at this rash behaviour. Nimrod had Abraham immolated on a funeral pyre, but God turned the fire into water and the burning coals into fish. Abraham himself was hurled into the air from the hill where the fortress stands, but landed safely in a bed of roses.

The picturesque Gölbaşı area of Urfa is a symbolic re-creation of this story. Two rectangular pools of water (Balıklı Göl and Aynı Zeliha) are filled with supposedly sacred carp, while the area west of the Hasan Padişah Camii is a gorgeous rose garden. Local legend has it that anyone catching the carp will go blind. Consequently, these appear to be the most pampered, portly fish in Turkey.

On the northern side of Balıklı Göl is the elegant **Rizvaniye Vakfı Camii & Medresesi**, with a much-photographed arcaded wall, while at the western end is the **Halilur Rahman Camii**. This 13th-century building, replacing an earlier Byzantine church, houses the site where Abraham fell to the ground. The two pools are fed by a spring at the base of Damlacık hill, on which the castle is built.

DERGAH

Immediately to the southeast of the pools and the park is the Dergah complex of mosques and parks surrounding the colonnaded courtyard of the **Hazreti İbrahim Halilullah** (Prophet Abraham's Birth Cave; admission TL1), built and rebuilt over the centuries as an active place of pilgrimage. Its western side is marked by the **Mevlidi Halil Camii**, a large Ottoman-style mosque. At its southern side you'll see the entrance to the Hazreti İbrahim Halilullah in which legend has it that Abraham was born. He

lived here in hiding for his first seven years – King Nimrod, responding to a prophecy he'd received in a dream, feared that a newly born would eventually steal his crown, so he had all babies killed. This is still a place of pilgrimage and prayer, with separate entrances for men and women.

To the north, on Göl Caddesi, is the **Hasan Padişah Camii** (1460), but it's of little interest inside. All of these buildings are open to visitors but, as they are important places of worship, you should be modestly dressed.

MOSQUES

Urfa's Syrian-style **Ulu Cami** (Divan Yolu Caddesi) dates from the period 1170–75. Its 13 *eyvans* (vaulted halls) open onto a spacious forecourt with a tall tower topped by a clock with Ottoman numerals.

At Kara Meydanı, the square midway between the *belediye* (town hall) and Dergah, is the **Hüseyin Paşa Camii**, a late-Ottoman work built in 1849.

On Vali Fuat Caddesi, which leads up from behind Gölbaşı to the Cevahir Konuk Evi (see boxed text, p612), is the enormous, beautifully restored **Selahattin Eyubi Camii**. It was once St John's Church, as you can see by the altar, and is adorned with carvings. Follow Vali Fuat Caddesi north and you'll notice the **Yeni Fırırlı Camii**, another finely restored building, once the Armenian Church of the Twelve Apostles.

ŞANLIURFA MUSEUM

Up the hill to the west of the *vilayet* (provincial government headquarters) building, off Atatürk Caddesi, is the **Şanlıurfa Museum** (Şanlıurfa Müzesi; admission TL2; ☎ 8am–5pm Tue–Sun) captivates visitors with a journey through eastern Turkey's archaeological evolution.

The gardens contain various sculptures, and on the porch as you enter are several mosaics, the most interesting showing assorted wild animals. Inside, noteworthy artefacts include Neolithic implements, Assyrian, Babylonian and Hittite relief stones and other objects from Byzantine, Seljuk and Ottoman times.

BAZAAR

After visiting the museum, ponder on your new-found knowledge with a wander through Urfa's **bazaar** (☎ daylight Mon–Sat). Spreading east of the Narıncı Camii, it is a jumble of streets, some covered, some open, selling every-

thing from sheepskins and pigeons to jeans and handmade shoes. It was largely built by Süleyman the Magnificent in the mid-16th century. The best idea is just to dive in and inevitably get lost. Women should be on guard for lustful hands.

One of the most interesting areas is the **bedesten** (covered market), an ancient caravanserai where silk goods were sold. Today you'll still find silk scarves here, as well as gaudy modern carpets and the lovely blue and red scarves worn by local women. Right by the *bedesten* is the **Gümrük Hanı** (customs depot), with a delightful courtyard that is always full of tea- or coffee-swilling moustached gents playing backgammon, providing an authentic ambience.

Buried in the lanes of the bazaar are several ancient and very cheap **hamams**, including **Arasa Hamamı**.

OLD HOUSES

Delve into Urfa's back streets and you'll find examples of the city's distinctive limestone houses with protruding bays supported on stone corbels. Although many of these houses are falling into decay (and some are far too large for modern families), a few have been restored, most notably the house of Hacı Hafızlar, near the PTT, which has been turned into an art gallery, the **Güzel Sanatlar Galerisi** (☎ 8am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, noon–4pm Sat). The courtyards and fine carved stonework are a joy to behold and the custodians don't mind you wandering through.

You can also pop into the **Şurkav** (Balıklı Göl Mevkii), a local government building near the entrance to Hotel Edessa, where the courtyard is draped with greenery.

In the market area, in the neighbourhood called Beykapı Mahallesi (take 1001 Sokak), try to find the **İl Özel İdaresi Kültür Ve Sanat Merkezi**, another splendid house restored in 2002. It was once a church. Nearby, a stately building now houses a school, the **İlköğretim Okulu**. Look for the elaborate lintels and the colonnades that adorn the facade.

PROPHET JOB'S SITE

Although it's not the highlight of a trip, Prophet Job's Site is worth the bus ride for its historic significance. It's about 1km south-east of the Gölbaşı district. Legend holds that Eyyüp (Job) was a prosperous and devout man, thus despised by İblis (Satan). İblis took

away Job's health, wealth and family, to force him into a crisis of faith. Instead, Job retreated to the **cave** (Eyyüp Peygamber Makamı) you see here, where he waited patiently in devotion to God. After seven years, God restored his possessions and health, the latter by means of a freshwater spring that Job unleashed by thumping the ground with his heel. Pilgrims come here to wish for the patience of Job and to restore their health with the spring water collected from a **well**.

Entrance is free but a small donation is expected. The nearby mosque features exquisite tiled archways.

Regular 'Eyyüp Pey' minibuses departing from outside the Urfa bazaar will drop you right by the gate to the compound.

Sleeping

BUDGET

The Hotel Bakay is often recommended as a comfortable place for solo women; unmarried couples should feel welcome at Hotel İpek Palas. Ignore the touts for the pensions who may accost you at the bus station or in the centre – we've had some bad reports about these pensions especially from women.

Otel Doğu (☎ 215 1228; Sarayönü Caddesi; s/d TL15/25) We can't remember a more minimalist 'reception': one stool and one counter attended by a moustached man. Try to resist the temptation to run away, because the rooms are fine for the price you pay, with clean-smelling bathrooms (well, cubicles), bare floors, a super central location and double-glazing. Some rooms have shared bathrooms. The catch? No air-con and no fan equals Dante's inferno in summer.

Hotel Bakay (☎ 215 8975; fax 215 4007; Asfalt Caddesi; s/d TL30/50; ☺ ☑) The Bakay is a safe bet that won't hurt the hip pocket, and is remarkably clean, but be prepared to trip over your backpack in the tiny rooms. Some are brighter than others, so ask to ogle a few before settling in. Standout features include crisp sheets, a pretty good location, pathogen-free bathrooms and a satisfying *kahvaltı* (breakfast). It's popular with Turkish families – a good sign for female travellers.

Hotel İpek Palas (☎ 215 1546; Köprübaşı Dünya Hastanesi Arkası; s/d TL30/50, without bathroom TL20/30; ☺) The slightly peeling walls and the tatty carpets will give you a rude awakening, but otherwise the İpek delivers the goods perfectly adequately, with friendly staff, functional bathrooms and an excellent location. And

yes, there's air-con. It's worth shelling out for the more expensive rooms with private facilities. Breakfast is skimpy, but Zahter Kahvaltı (see p612) is an egg's toss away.

Hotel Güven (☎ 215 1700; www.hotelguven.com; Sarayönü Caddesi; s/d TL40/60; ☺) The whiff of hospital-strength disinfectant when we checked in is testament to the place's spotlessness. Pity about the neon-lit corridors, though, which are as sexy as a dentist's waiting room. It's super central, and the rooms are well insulated from the hubbub of the main drag. The views from the rooftop breakfast room are particularly lovely.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Rabis (☎ 216 9595; www.hotelrabis.com, in Turkish; Sarayönü Caddesi; s/d TL60/80; ☺) Urfa's latest arrival is a model of shiny midrange quality; the decor is light brown and beige, with thick carpets, flat-screen TVs and double-glazing. Good views from the rooftop terrace, too. One of the best deals in town.

Hotel Arte (☎ 314 7060; www.otel-arte.com.tr; Köprübaşı Caddesi; s/d TL60/90; ☺) Style and sleekness in Urfa? Yes, it's possible at the Arte. The design-led interior, with Barbie-esque plastic chairs in the lobby, laminated floors and contemporary furniture in the rooms, is appealing, and the floor-to-ceiling windows afford superb views of the main drag.

Hotel Harran (☎ 313 2860; www.hotelharran.com; Köprübaşı Caddesi; s/d TL60/95; ☺ ☑ ☑) A long-time favourite, this hulking tower lordling it over the main drag seems unfazed by its upstart new rival, the Rabis. It has the full complement of services and can't be faulted for cleanliness, but it scores nil in the charm department. Plus points include an on-site restaurant (with a good choice of Turkish tipples), a hamam (men only), a sauna and a swimming-pool.

Hotel Edessa & Narlı Evi (☎ 215 9911; fax 215 5030; Balıklı Göl Mevkii; s/d TL75/120; ☺) This venture has a split personality. The old wing (the Edessa) features bland rooms that don't even register a blip on the charm radar, while the new wing (the Narlı Evi) has a boutique feel and consists of 12 vaulted rooms that are tastefully decorated. Be sure to book one room in the Narlı Evi.

Hotel El-Ruha (☎ 215 4411; www.hotelelruha.com, in Turkish; Balıklı Göl; s/d TL100/135; ☺ ☑ ☑) No-one could accuse the El-Ruha management of a lack of ambition – the list of facilities is prolific,

with a sauna, a hamam, a pool, two huge caves dedicated for those oh-so-popular *sıra geceleri* ('traditional nights' – live music evenings), a restaurant and a fitness centre. It pulls in pious yet wealthy pilgrims interested in unmonastic, fairly chintzy rooms with thick carpets and mahogany-like furniture. Alcohol is forbidden on the premises but you're here to repent your sins in the nearby Dergah complex, right?

Eating & Drinking

Urfa's culinary specialities include: Urfa kebab (skewered chunks of lamb served with tomatoes, sliced onions and hot peppers); *çiğ köfte*; *içli köfte* (deep-fried mutton-filled meatballs covered with bulgur); and *şillik*, a type of walnut pancake. It pays to be a bit careful what you eat in Urfa, especially in summer, because the heat makes food poisoning more likely. Alcohol is not usually served.

Baklavacı Badıllı Dedeoğlu (☎ 215 3737; Sarayönü Caddesi; pastries TL1-2) Death by pistachio baklavas, pistachio *sarması* ('vine leaves') and other suave stuff – pick your sweet poison and thicken your arteries.

Birlik Pastanesi (☎ 313 1823; Köprübaşı Caddesi; pastries TL2) This pastry shop has a tantalising array of cakes and other goodies.

Hacıbaba Kadayıf (Sarayönü Caddesi; pastries TL2) Back home, don't tell your dietician that you couldn't resist the *peynirli kadayıf* (cheese-filled shredded wheat doused in honey) at this little den near the Yusuf Paşa Camii.

Zahter Kahvaltı & Kebap Salonu (Köprübaşı Caddesi; mains TL2-5) Skip your hotel's breakfast and instead wolf down gooey honey, *pekmez* (grape syrup), jam and cream on flat bread at this cute little place on the main drag. Wash it all down with a large glass of *çay* or *ayran* – all for around TL4.

Büyükfırat (☎ 215 8552; Sarayönü Caddesi; mains TL4-9) With its fountain and breezy outdoor seating, this restaurant-café-fast-food joint is the perfect salve after a day's sightseeing. Here you can nosh on burgers, pizzas, stews and kebaps or slug down a freshly squeezed orange juice.

our pick Çift Mağara (☎ 215 9757; Çift Kubbe Altı Balıklıgöl; mains TL4-9) The dining room is directly carved into the rocky bluff that overlooks the Gölbaşı, but the lovely terrace for dining al-fresco beats the cavernous interior (views!). It's famed for its delicious *içli köfte*. If only it served alcohol, life would be perfect.

Gülhan Restaurant (☎ 313 3318; Atatürk Bulvarı; mains TL6-11) Razor-sharp waiters (wearing ties); well-presented food that impresses rather than threatens; the right mood; slick and salubrious surrounds; a pictorial menu with English translations to help you choose – all good ingredients. Everything's pretty good, but if you want a recommendation, go for the Bursa İskender kebab.

Be sure to try one of the restaurants set in atmospheric *konuk* (mansions); see boxed text, below.

URFA'S SPECIAL PLACES

Urfa's famed for its atmospheric *konuk evi* – charming 19th-century stone mansions that have been converted into restaurants and, to a lesser extent, hotels. They usually feature a courtyard around which are arranged several comfy *şark odası* (Ottoman-style lounges), as well as a few rooms upstairs. They are smart places to rest your head and get a typical Urfa experience but bear in mind that they can be noisy at weekends when they host *sıra geceleri* (live music evenings). Also note that not all rooms have private facilities. Consider the following options:

Beyzade Konak (☎ 216 3535; www.beyzadekonak.com, in Turkish; Sarayönü Caddesi, Beyaz Sokak; s/d TL30/60, mains TL4-9; 🍴) Good food and comfy lounges but the rooms don't quite live up to the atmospheric surrounds.

Çardaklı Köşk (☎ 217 1080; Vali Fuat Caddesi, Tünel Çıkışı; mains TL6-10) This old house has been so restored it feels almost new. Food is only so-so – the real wow is the view over Gölbaşı from the upstairs terrace. No accommodation.

Cevahir Konuk Evi (☎ 215 4678; www.cevahirkonukevi.com; Yeni Mahalle Sokak; s/d TL70/130, mains TL6-10; 🍴) Excellent *tebbule* (tabouleh) and faultlessly cooked *tavuk şiş* (roast chicken kebab). Accommodation-wise, the six rooms are a bit disappointing, with mismatched furniture and brownish carpets.

Gülizar Konukevi (☎ 215 0505; Karameydanı Camii Yanı; s/d TL30/55, mains TL7-12; 🍴) Good food and traditional surrounds. The six rooms in the mansion across the street were being given the final touches when we visited.

Pınarbaşı Konağı (☎ 215 3919; 12 Eylül Caddesi; mains TL8-10) Offers an eclectic menu, with kebaps, grills and stews. No accommodation.

SERVICES FROM ŞANLIURFA'S OTOGAR

Destination	Fare (TL)	Duration (hr)	Distance (km)	Frequency (per day)
Adana	25	6	365	frequent
Ankara	40	13	850	5-6
Diyarbakır	15	3	190	frequent
Erzurum	35	12	665	1
Gaziantep	15	2½	145	frequent
İstanbul	50	20	1290	a few
Kayseri	30	9	515	2
Malatya	20	7	395	1
Mardin	15	3	175	a few
Van	35	9	585	2

If all you want is to relax over a cup of tea in leafy surrounds, head for the various *çay bahçesi* (tea gardens) in the Gölbaşı park – a great experience any time of the day.

Entertainment

Urfa is an equivocal city: pious during the day, wild in the evening. What makes the city tick is the *sıra geceleri* that are held in the *konuk* (see boxed text, opposite), usually at weekends. Guests sit, eat, sing and dance in *şark odası* (lounges) and, after the meal, a live band plays old favourites that keep revellers rocking and dancing. Foreigners are welcome to join the party and showcase their dance repertoire.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is 40km from the centre. **Turkish Airlines** (☎ 215 3344; www.thy.com; Kalıru Turizm Seyahat Acentesi, Sarayönü Caddesi; ✈ 8.30am-6.30pm) has daily flights to/from Ankara (from TL99, 1½ hours) and İstanbul (TL114). A bus service leaves from outside the office for the airport, 1½ hours before check-in (TL15).

BUS

The otogar, on the main highway serving the southeast, receives plenty of traffic, but most buses are passing through, so you must take whatever seats are available. Buses to the otogar can be caught on Atatürk Bulvarı (TL1). Taxis usually ask TL10 for the short hop between the otogar and the main drag. Details of some daily services are listed in the table, above. There are plans to relocate the otogar outside the city in 2010.

Minibuses to Akçakale (TL5), Harran (5TL), Bircik (TL10), Kahta (TL15) and Adıyaman

(TL8, two hours) leave from the minibüs terminal beside the otogar. If you're travelling to Syria, you'll need to catch a minibüs to Akçakale, then catch a taxi over the border to Talabiyya. Take note that the border is open from 11am to 3pm on the Syrian side (closed on Friday). For Harran, Harran-Nemrut Tours (p609) can organise pick-ups in the centre at no extra cost, even for one traveller.

CAR

For car hire try **Kalıru Turizm Seyahat Acentesi** (☎ 215 3344; fax 216 3245; Sarayönü Caddesi, Köprübaşı; ✈ 8.30am-6.30pm), the Turkish Airlines agency. Harran-Nemrut Tours (p609) can also arrange car rental for about TL80 per day.

HARRAN

☎ 0414 / pop 6900

Don't skip Harran. It seems certain that this settlement is one of the oldest continuously inhabited spots on Earth. The Book of Genesis mentions Harran and its most famous resident, Abraham, who stayed here for a few years back in 1900 BC. Its ruined walls and Ulu Cami, crumbling fortress and beehive houses are powerful, evocative sights and give the city a feeling of deep antiquity. Traditionally, locals lived by farming and smuggling, but the coming of the Atatürk Dam looks set to change that as cotton fields sprout over what was once desert. Many seemingly poor villagers are actually quite comfortably off, with huge TVs and ghetto blasters in their houses.

On arrival in Harran you are officially expected to buy a ticket (TL2), but there may not be anyone in the booth to collect the money. If anyone in the castle tries to charge you, insist on being given the official ticket.

History

Besides being the place of Abraham's sojourn, Harran is famous as a centre of worship of Sin, god of the moon. Worship of the sun, moon and planets was popular in Harran, and at neighbouring Soğmatar, from about 800 BC until AD 830, although Harran's temple to the moon god was destroyed by the Byzantine emperor Theodosius in AD 382. Battles between Arabs and Byzantines occupied the townsfolk until the coming of the Crusaders. The fortress, which some say was built on the ruins of the moon god's temple, was restored when the Crusaders approached. The Crusaders won and maintained it for a while before they, too, moved on.

Sights

BEEHIVE HOUSES

Harran is famous for its beehive houses, the design of which may date back to the 3rd century BC, although the present examples were mostly constructed within the last 200 years. It's thought that the design evolved partly in response to lack of wood for making roofs and partly because the ruins provided a ready source of reusable bricks. Although the Harran houses are unique in Turkey, similar buildings can be found in northern Syria.

The **Harran Kültür Evi**, within walking distance of the castle, is set up to allow visitors to see inside one of the houses and then sip cold drinks in the walled courtyard afterwards. The **Harran Evi** is similar.

KALE

On the far (east) side of the hill, the crumbling *kale* stands right by some beehive houses. Although a castle probably already existed on the site from Hittite times, what you see now dates mainly from after 1059 when the Fatimids took over and restored it. Originally, there were four multi-angular corner towers, but only two remain. Once there were also 150 rooms here, but many of these have caved in or are slowly filling up with silt.

WALLS & MOSQUE

The crumbling stone **city walls** were once 4km long and studded with 187 towers and four gates; of these only the overly restored **Aleppo Gate**, near the new part of town, remains.

Of the ruins inside the village other than the *kale*, the **Ulu Cami**, built in the 8th century by Marwan II, last of the Umayyad caliphs,

is most prominent. You'll recognise it by its tall, square and very un-Turkish minaret. It's said to be the oldest mosque in Anatolia. Near here stood the first Islamic university, and on the hillside above it you'll see the low-level ruins of ancient Harran dating back some 5000 years.

Sleeping

Most people visit from Urfa on a day trip.

Bazda Motel (☎ 441 3590; bazda1@ttnet; s/d/ste TL35/50/80; ♿) On the road as you come into town, you can't miss this motel – it's been designed to mimic the beehive houses. This is a nice surprise, with modern and serviceable rooms, prim bathrooms, colourful bed linen, a recent lick of paint on the walls, satellite TVs and a grassy area. One problem, though: it's occupied by teachers most times of the year (but welcomes travellers if it's slack).

Harran Evi (☎ 441 2020; bed with full board TL40) This is the place to choose if you want to text your friends 'I've slept in a beehive'. Truth is, it will probably be too hot to do so and you'll end up sleeping under the stars on raised *tahts* (sleeping thrones). A bit folksy (tour groups stop here for souvenirs when they visit Harran), but quirky and atmospheric, top marks go to the ablutions blocks, with their mix of functioning flush and squat toilets, all kept *temiz* (clean).

Harran Kültür Evi (☎ 441 2477; beds with full board TL40) Same concept as the Harran Evi.

Getting There & Away

Getting to Harran is straightforward and you don't really need to take a tour. Minibuses (TL5, one hour) leave from Urfa's otogar approximately every hour and will drop you at the new part of Harran near the *belediye* and PTT – it's a 10-minute walk to the old part.

If you're driving to Harran, leave Urfa by the Akçakale road at the southeastern end of town and go 40km to a turn-off to the left (east). From there, it's another 10km to Harran.

AROUND HARRAN

Although the sites beyond Harran are missable if you're pushed for time, it would be a shame not to see the astonishing transformation wrought on the local scenery by the GAP project (see boxed text, p607) – field upon field of cotton and barley where once there was just desert.

To get around the sites without your own transport is virtually impossible unless you have limitless time. The roads have been upgraded over the last few years but signage is insufficient, so the tours offered by Harran-Nemrut Tours (see p609) are certainly worth considering. For TL15 per person for four or more people you visit Harran, Han el Ba'rur, Şuayb City and Soğmatar, with a chance to take tea with villagers. Expect a simple taxi service. You may need to take a picnic lunch, or you might have a village lunch stop. It's useful to have a pocketful of change for the tips you'll be expected to give.

Bazda Caves

About 20km east of Harran you can visit the impressive Bazda Caves (signed 'Bazda Mağaları'), which are supposed to have been used to build the walls of Harran.

Han el Ba'rur

A further 6km east are the remains of the Seljuk Han el Ba'rur, a caravanserai built in 1128 to service the local trade caravans. Although some restoration work has been done here, there are not enough visitors to justify any services (or tickets for that matter).

Şuayb City

Another 12km northeast of Han el Ba'rur are the extensive remains of Şuayb City, where hefty stone walls and lintels survive above a network of subterranean rooms. One of these contains a mosque on the site of the supposed home of the prophet Jethro. Once again, don't expect to find any services, but it's a good idea to bring a torch (flashlight) and to wear sturdy shoes.

Soğmatar

About 18km north of Şuayb, the isolated village of Soğmatar is a very atmospheric, eerie place, surrounded by a barren landscape with bare rocks and ledges. On one of the ledges there was once an open-air temple, where sacrifices were made to the sun and moon gods, whose effigies can be seen carved into the side of the ledge. Like Harran, Soğmatar was a centre for the cult worship of Sin, the moon god, from about AD 150 to AD 200. This open-air altar was the central, main temple. In a cave near the centre of the village you'll find 12 carved statues as well as Assyrian inscriptions.

Standing on the summit of the structure, you can see remains of other temples on the surrounding hills. There were apparently seven in all.

Once again there are no services at Soğmatar, although villagers will no doubt be happy to point out the sites.

KAHTA

☎ 0416 / pop 60,700

Dusty Kahta isn't the most atmospheric place to spend a holiday, but it's well set up for visits to Nemrut Dağı, with plenty of tours on offer and a decent selection of hotels. If you'd prefer somewhere more inspiring head straight to Karadut Pension (see p621).

A good time to visit would be 25 June when the three-day **International Kahta Kommagene Festival** starts, with music, folk dancing and all sorts of fun and games. All the hotels will be filled with tour groups, so it's wise to book ahead at this time.

You'll find several internet cafés on the main drag.

Sleeping

Pension Kommagene (☎ 725 9726; fax 725 5548; Mustafa Kemal Caddesi; camp sites per person TL7, s/d TL35/50; 🚽) The most obvious choice for budget-minded travellers, not so much because of its inherent merits, but because of the lack of competitors in this price bracket. Rooms are unflashy but clean, secure and well organised. Campers can pitch their tent on the parking lot, and the ablutions block is shipshape. Add TL6 for breakfast and TL12 for dinner. Expect some hard selling with tours to Nemrut at some point.

Hotel Nemrut (☎ 725 6881; www.hotelnemrut.net; Mustafa Kemal Caddesi; s/d TL45/70; 🚽) There's nothing distinctive about this stolid lump with a glass-fronted facade. It's just your run-of-the-mill motel, with uninspiring yet well-maintained rooms and excellent bathrooms. Tour groups stop here on their way to Nemrut. A few smiles at the reception would sweeten the deal.

Zeus Hotel (☎ 725 5694; www.zeushotel.com.tr; Mustafa Kemal Caddesi; camp sites per person TL20, s/d TL80/100; 🚽 🍷) Another group-friendly stalwart, opposite the Hotel Nemrut. This solid three-star option gets an A+ for its swimming pool in the manicured garden – blissful after a long day's travelling by bus. Angle for the renovated rooms, which feature top-notch bathrooms and flat-screen TVs. Campers can

pitch tents on the parking lot and have their own ablutions block.

Eating

All accommodation options have restaurants but if you want to dine out there are a couple of eateries on the main drag.

Papatya Restaurant (☎ 726 2989; Mustafa Kemal Caddesi; mains TL4-7) This snappy joint next to Hotel Nemrut whips up all the usual suspects. There's no menu – just point at what you want.

Kahta Sofrası (☎ 726 2055; Mustafa Kemal Caddesi; mains TL4-8) Off the main intersection, this is the most obvious place to line the stomach without breaking the bank. Tasty kebabs and melt-in-your-mouth pide.

For something different take a taxi (about TL8) to the vast lake formed by the Atatürk Dam, about 4km east of Kahta. The lure is the two licensed restaurants serving fresh fish, with lovely views over the lake. It's well worth the detour.

Akropalian (☎ 725 5132; Baraj Yolu; mains TL5-9) Perched on a hillside, about 1km from the lakeshore. Bag a seat in the verdant *bahçe* and drink in the views.

Neşetin Yeri (☎ 725 7675; Baraj Yolu; mains TL5-9) The leafy garden is soothingly positioned right by the lakeside (avoid the hospital-like dining room). Tuck into a faultless grilled *alabalık* (trout), served in a *kiremit* (clay pot), with a background symphony of frogs; come just before sunset. It can't get more atmospheric than this.

Getting There & Away

Kahta's small otogar is in the town centre with the minibuses and taxi stands right beside it. There are regular buses to Adiyaman (TL1, 30 minutes, 32km), Ankara (TL40, 12 hours, 807km), Istanbul (TL60, 20 hours, 1352km), Kayseri (TL35, seven hours, 487km), Malatya (TL10, 3½ hours, 225km) and Şanlıurfa (TL10, 2½ hours, 106km).

There are three daily services (except Sunday) to Karadut (TL5), usually at 1.30pm, 3pm and 4.30pm. Minibuses return from Karadut between 7.30am and 8.30am the next day.

The road east to Diyarbakır was flooded by the lake formed behind the Atatürk Dam, and buses from Kahta now travel to Diyarbakır north of the lake (TL20, five hours, 174km). A more interesting way to travel is via one of

the six daily minibuses to Siverek, which are timed to meet the ferries across the lake. In Siverek you may have to wait half an hour or so for a connection to Diyarbakır.

NEMRUT DAĞI NATIONAL PARK

Mt Nemrut National Park (Nemrut Dağı Milli Parkı) is probably the star attraction of eastern Turkey, and rightly so. The enigmatic statues sitting atop the summit have become a symbol of Turkey. The stunning scenery and historical sights and the undeniable sense of mystique and folly that emanates from the site make a visit here essential.

The spellbinding peak of **Nemrut Dağı** (*nehm-root dah-uh*) rises to a height of 2150m in the Anti-Taurus Range between the provincial capital of Malatya to the north and Kahta in Adiyaman province to the south. It is not to be confused with the less visited Nemrut Dağı (3050m, p642) near Lake Van.

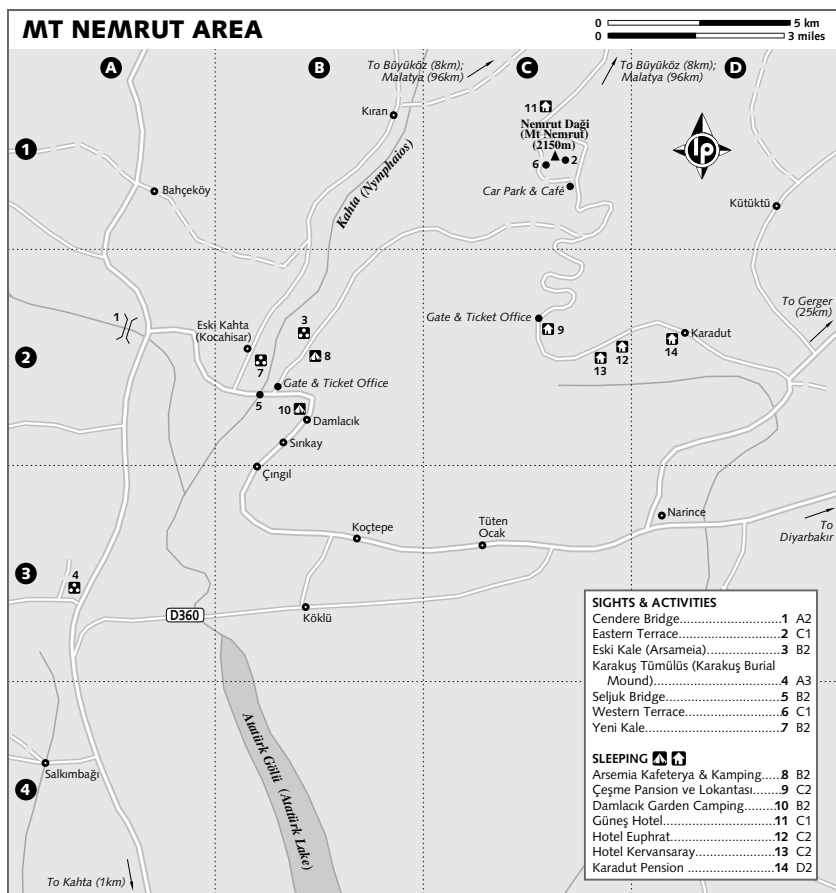
Nobody knew anything about Nemrut Dağı until 1881, when a German engineer, employed by the Ottomans to assess transport routes, was astounded to come across the statues covering this remote mountaintop. Archaeological work didn't begin until 1953, when the American School of Oriental Research undertook the project.

The summit was created when a megalomaniac pre-Roman local king cut two ledges in the rock, filled them with colossal statues of himself and the gods (his relatives – or so he thought), then ordered an artificial mountain peak of crushed rock 50m high to be piled between them. The king's tomb and those of three female relatives may well lie beneath those tonnes of rock. Nobody knows for sure.

Earthquakes have toppled the heads from most of the statues, and now many of the colossal bodies sit silently in rows with the 2m-high heads watching from the ground.

Although it's relatively easy to get to the summit with your own vehicle, most people take tours, organised in either Kahta or Malatya or, increasingly, from Şanlıurfa or Cappadocia (see boxed text, p620).

Plan to visit Nemrut between late May and mid-October, and preferably in July or August; the road to the summit becomes impassable with snow at other times. Remember that at any time of year, even in high summer, it will be chilly and windy on top of the mountain. This is especially true at sunrise, the coldest



time of the day. Take warm clothing on your trek to the top, no matter when you go.

There are various accommodation options on the mountain, and it's well worth taking advantage of them since the stunning views and peaceful setting make up for any lack of mod cons. Be sure to check that adequate blankets are provided.

History

From 250 BC onwards, this region straddled the border between the Seleucid Empire (which followed the empire of Alexander the Great in Anatolia) and the Parthian Empire to the east, also occupying a part of Alexander's lands. A small but strategic area, rich, fertile and covered in forests, it had a history of inde-

pendent thinking ever since the time of King Samos (c 163 BC).

Under the Seleucid Empire, the governor of Commagene declared his kingdom's independence. In 80 BC, with the Seleucids in disarray and Roman power spreading into Anatolia, a Roman ally named Mithridates I Callinicus proclaimed himself king and set up his capital at Arsameia, near the modern village of Eski Kahta. Mithridates prided himself on his royal ancestry, tracing his forebears back to Seleucus I Nicator, founder of the Seleucid Empire to the west, and to Darius the Great, king of ancient Persia to the east. Thus he saw himself as heir to both glorious traditions.

Mithridates died in 64 BC and was succeeded by his son Antiochus I Epiphanes

(r 64–38 BC), who consolidated his kingdom's security by immediately signing a nonaggression treaty with Rome, turning his kingdom into a Roman buffer against attack from the Parthians. His good relations with both sides allowed him to grow rich and revel in delusions of grandeur, seeing himself as equal to the great god-kings of the past. It was Antiochus who ordered the building of the fabulous temples and funerary mound on top of Nemrut.

In the 3rd decade of his reign, Antiochus sided with the Parthians in a squabble with Rome, and in 38 BC the Romans deposed him. From then on, Commagene was alternately ruled directly from Rome or by puppet kings until AD 72, when Emperor Vespasian incorporated it into Roman Asia. The great days of Commagene were thus limited to the 26-year reign of Antiochus.

Orientation

There are three ways of approaching the summit. From the southern side, you will pass through Karadut, a village some 12km from the top, before embarking upon the bone-jolting last few kilometres to the car park. From the southwestern side, you will travel via a secondary road that goes past Eski Kale (Arsameia) and climbs steeply for about 10km until it merges with the Karadut road, some 6km before the car park at the summit. From the northern side, you can start from Malatya – it's a long 98km haul, but it's a very scenic drive and the road is asphalted until the Güneş Hotel, near the summit. If you don't want to backtrack, it's possible to do a loop (see p622).

It costs TL5 to enter Mt Nemrut National Park. Coming from the southwest, the entrance gate is at the turn-off to Eski Kale (Arsameia); from the south, the gate is just past Çeşme Pansion; from the north, the gate is at the Güneş Hotel.

At the car park just below the summit are a café and toilets. To reach the ruins themselves, you'll have to walk for about 600m.

Sights & Activities

KARAKUŞ TÜMÜLÜS

Highway D360, marked for Nemrut Dağı Milli Parkı (9km), starts in Kahta next to the Pension Kommagene. After a few kilometres, you'll reach a fork; the road to the left takes you 1.5km to **Karakuş Tümülüs**. Like the Nemrut mound, the Karakuş burial mound, built in 36 BC, is artificial. A handful of columns ring

the mound – there were more but the limestone blocks were used by the Romans to build the Cendere bridge (below). An eagle tops a column at the car park, a lion tops another around the mound, and a third has an inscribed slab explaining that the burial mound holds female relatives of King Mithridates II. From Karakuş the summit of Nemrut is clearly, if distantly, visible; it's the highest point on the horizon to the northeast.

Backtrack to the fork and turn left (due east), continuing on the D360.

CENDERE BRIDGE

Some 10km from the Karakuş Tümülüs, the road crosses a modern bridge over the Cendere River. On the left-hand side, you'll see a magnificent humpback Roman bridge built in the 2nd century AD. The surviving Latin stela state that the bridge was built in honour of Emperor Septimius Severus and his wife and sons (long after Commagene had become part of Roman Asia). Of the four original Corinthian columns (two at either end), three are still standing.

ESKİ KAHTA (KOCAHİSAR) & YENİ KALE

About 5km from the bridge you can take a 1km detour off the main road to the village of **Eski Kahta**, also known as Kocahisar, which is overlooked by castle ruins. Although there was once a palace here, built at the same time as the Commagene capital of Arsameia on the other side of the ravine, what you see today are the ruins of a 13th-century Mamluk castle, **Yeni Kale** (New Fortress). There are some Arabic inscriptions above the main and only gateway. You can climb up to look at the castle, but make sure you're wearing appropriate shoes, and watch your step.

At the base of the path up to the castle is the **Kocahisar Halı Kursu** (Kocahisar Carpet Course), a rudimentary workshop where local women learn carpet-weaving techniques to keep the tradition alive. They don't sell the carpets here but usually won't mind if you poke your head in to have a look.

After Yeni Kale you'll cross the Kahta (Nymphaios) River, where you can see the old road that crossed the river at a graceful **Seljuk Bridge**.

ESKİ KALE (ARSAMEİA)

About 1.5km further along the main road, a road to the left takes you 2km to Eski Kale,

the ancient Commagene capital of Arsameia, founded by Mithridates I Callinicus in around 80 BC and added to by his son Antiochus I. Just after the turn-off, you stop at the **park entrance**, where you'll be asked to pay for both the Arsameia site and access to the summit (TL5).

At Eski Kale, walk up the path from the car park. Just off to the left you'll come to a large **stele** depicting Mithras (or Apollo), the sun god, wearing a cap with sunrays radiating from it. Further along are two more **stelae**. Only the bases have survived, but they were thought to depict Mithridates I Callinicus, with Antiochus I, the taller stele, holding a sceptre. Behind them is a cave entrance leading down to an underground room. These cave-temple structures were thought to have been built for Mithras-worshipping rites.

Continue on the path uphill to the striking and virtually undamaged stone relief that portrays Mithridates I shaking hands with the god Heracles. Next to it is another cave-temple that descends 158m through the rock. Don't attempt to go down the steps as they are said to be perilous. The long Greek inscription above the cave describes the founding of Arsameia; the water trough beside it may have been used for religious ablutions.

Above the relief on the level top of the hill are what are left of the foundations of Mithridates' capital city, and a spectacular view – the perfect spot for a picnic.

ARSAMEIA TO THE SUMMIT

From Arsameia you can take the 16km partly surfaced short cut to the summit or back-track to the main road, which is a longer route but less steep and fully surfaced. The short cut leaves from beside the entrance to Arsameia and slogs up the mountain for about 8km to join the main route about 6km before the summit car park. It's passable only during daytime and in dry weather, and it has precipitous hairpin bends, so drive slowly and very carefully. The last 2km before the junction are unpaved and can be muddy if it's wet.

Most tours combine the two routes, thus making a loop. Sunrise tours take the longer route (via Narince and Karadut) on the way up and take the short cut to descend back to Kahta. Sunset tours take the short cut on the way up and the longer route to get back to Kahta.

If you take the longer route from Arsameia, return to the main road and turn left. About 3km further is the sleepy village of **Damlack**. Then you'll pass through various little stone-house settlements until you reach larger **Narince**, where a turn-off to the left is marked for Nemrut. North of Karadut, the last half-hour's travel (12km) to the summit is along a steep, bumpy road mostly paved with basalt blocks. The last 3km are particularly horrendous – you'll have to drive in first gear.

Hiking

Travellers staying in Karadut can walk the 12km to the summit. It's a clearly marked road with a steady gradient.

THE SUMMIT

By the time you arrive at the car park and café you're well above the tree line. The **Nemrut Dağı park entrance** (admission TL5; ☞ dawn-dusk) is 200m up from Çeşme Pansion and 2.5km before the junction with the short cut to Arsameia.

Beyond the building, hike 600m (about 20 minutes) over the broken rock of the stone pyramid to the **western terrace**. Antiochus I Epiphanes ordered the construction of a combined tomb and temple here. The site was to be approached by a ceremonial road and was to incorporate what Antiochus termed 'the thrones of the gods', which would be based 'on a foundation that will never be demolished'. Antiochus planned this construction to prove his faith in the gods, and in so doing assumed that upon his death his spirit would join that of Zeus-Ahura Mazda in heaven.

As you approach, the first thing you see is the western temple with the conical funerary mound of fist-sized stones behind it. At the western temple, Antiochus and his fellow gods sit in state, although their bodies have partly tumbled down, along with their heads.

From the western terrace it's five minutes' walk to the **eastern terrace**. Here the bodies are largely intact except for the fallen heads, which seem more badly weathered than the western heads. On the backs of the eastern statues are inscriptions in Greek.

Both terraces have similar plans, with the syncretistic gods, the 'ancestors' of Antiochus, seated. From left to right they are Apollo, the sun god (Mithra) to the Persians; Helios or Hermes to the Greeks; Fortuna, or Tyche; in the centre Zeus-Ahura Mazda; then King Antiochus; and on the far right Heracles, also

ORGANISED TOURS TO NEMRUT DAĞI (MT NEMRUT)

The main tour centres are Kahta and Malatya, but there are also tours from Karadut, Şanlıurfa and Cappadocia.

From Karadut

Several pensions in Karadut offer return trips to the summit, with one hour at the top for about TL40 per vehicle (Karadut Pension) or TL75 (hotels Euphrat or Kervansaray).

From Kahta

Kahta has always had a reputation as a rip-off town so you will need to be wary of what's on offer. Always check exactly what you will be seeing during the tour in addition to the heads themselves, and how long you'll be away for. The hotels and guesthouses in Kahta run most of the tours to Nemrut Dağı.

The majority of tours are timed to capture a dramatic sunrise or sunset. If you opt for the 'sunrise tours', you'll leave Kahta at about 2am via Narince and Karadut, arriving at Nemrut Dağı for sunrise. After an hour or so, you'll go down again following the upgraded direct road to Arsameia. Then you'll stop at Eski Kahta, Yeni Kale, Cendere Bridge and Karakaş Tümüülüs. Expect to be back in Kahta at about 10am. If you sign up for the 'sunset tour', you'll do the same loop but in the reverse direction – in other words, you'll leave at 1.30pm and start with the sights around Arsameia, then go up to the summit, before descending via Karadut and Narince. You'll be back in Kahta at 9.30pm.

A third option is the 'small tour', which lasts about three hours. It zips you from Kahta to the summit and back again, allowing about an hour for sightseeing. It's a bit less expensive (a taxi would charge about TL70), but it's much less interesting.

Although Kahta hotels and guest houses advertise these services as 'tours', you'll quickly catch on that they're only taxi services when your driver proffers comments like 'that's an old bridge'. If you want an informative English-speaking guide, go with **Mehmet Akbaba** (☎ 0535-295 4445; akbabamehmet@hotmail.com) or **Nemrut Tours** (☎ 0416-725 6881; Mustafa Kemal Caddesi), based in Hotel Nemrut. Expect to pay an additional TL100 per group.

known as Ares or Artagnes. The seated figures are several metres high, their heads alone about 2m tall.

Low walls at the sides of each temple once held carved reliefs showing processions of ancient Persian and Greek royalty, Antiochus' 'predecessors'. Statues of eagles represent Zeus.

Sleeping & Eating

There are several places to stay along the roads to the summit. The village of Karadut has a few small eateries. Places are listed in order of appearance, starting from the southwestern side (Eski Kale) up to the summit.

Damlacık Garden Camping (☎ 0416-741 2027; camp sites per person TL5; 🚻) Call it simple but hospitable. At Damlacık, about 2km from the junction for the entrance gate, this camping ground features a rudimentary ablutions block but the host family is genuinely courteous and the grassed camping areas work a treat. There's also a secure parking lot for camper vans,

equipped with electricity. In summer you'll probably be offered apricots and prunes from the orchard. Just forget about the minuscule swimming pool. Meals are available (TL8). Transport to Nemrut is TL60 per vehicle.

Arsemia Kafeterya & Kamping (☎ 0416-741 2118, 0505-320 0882; arsemia_52@hotmail.com; camp sites per person TL5, d per person TL15) If you're looking to tune into nature and drop out for a while, this is the place. Pitch your tent or park your campervan on a well laid-out ridge (no grass, alas, and no shade) and enjoy the wicked views over the valleys. The ablutions block is in good nick and there's even a nicely landscaped garden. On a balmy summer's night you can also drag a mattress out on the rooftop and sleep beneath the star-studded skies. At the time of research, the owners, the Karakaş family, were in the process of building five rooms with bathrooms. Mamma-style meals are available (about TL8). Transport to Nemrut costs TL70 per vehicle. It's in Eski Kale, about 1km past the entrance gate.

From Malatya

Malatya offers an alternative way to approach Nemrut Dağı. However, visiting Nemrut from this northern side means you miss out on the other fascinating sights on the southern flanks (reached via Kahta). You can get the best of both worlds by traversing the top by foot and hitching a ride to Kahta; if you're travelling by car you'll have to take the long route via Adıyaman.

The Malatya tourist office organises hassle-free minibus tours to Nemrut Dağı from early May to the end of September, or to mid-October if the weather is still warm. Tours leave at noon from near the tourist information booth in the tea garden behind the *valiliği* (provincial government offices).

The three-hour ride through dramatic scenery to the summit is asphalted all the way up. After enjoying the sunset from the summit for two hours, you descend to the Güneş Hotel. Here you have dinner and stay the night before taking the minibus back up to the summit for sunrise. After breakfast at the Güneş you return to Malatya at around 10am.

The per person cost of TL80 (minimum two people) includes transport, dinner, bed and breakfast, and you pay for admission to the national park and the site. In theory, there are tours every day, but if you turn up alone you have to be prepared to pay substantially more. If you prefer to descend via Kahta, hike across the summit to the car park and café building (30 minutes), and ask around for a minibus with an empty seat; or hitch a ride with someone going down to Kahta.

From Şanlıurfa

Two-day tours (TL120, minimum four) or sunrise/sunset tours (TL80, minimum four) to Nemrut are also available from Harran-Nemrut Tours (p609) in Şanlıurfa. These tours usually take you to the Atatürk Dam along the way. They're relatively good value, but don't expect more than a driver.

From Cappadocia

Many companies in Cappadocia (p500) offer minibus tours to Nemrut from mid-April to mid-November, despite the distance of over 500km each way. Two-day tours cost about TL250 and involve many hours of breakneck driving. If you have enough time, it's better to opt for a three-day tour, which allows the journey to be broken into more manageable chunks. Three-day tours usually also include Harran, Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep. Check where you'll be stopping before committing.

Karadut Pension (☎ 0416-737 2169; www.karadutpansiyon.net; camp sites per person TL5, d per person TL20;

📍) This pension-cum-hostel at the northern end of Karadut has 11 neat rooms (some with air-con), cleanish bathrooms and a kitchen you can use. Conditions are cramped; luggage usually occupies the last patch of floor space. Meals are available on request (about TL8). At the end of the day, treat yourself to a tippie (wine, beer or rakı) in the cute-as-a-button garden and you'll be in seventh heaven. Campers can pitch their tent in a partially shaded plot at the back, with good views over the mountains and a superclean ablutions block. Free internet at reception.

Çeşme Pansiyon ve Lokantası (☎ 0416-737 2032; camp sites per person TL5, s with half-board TL30) The closest shut-eye option to the summit (only 6km; the owners will drive you there for TL25). Depending on how you look at it, you'll find the rooms (all with private bathrooms) either bleak (greyish, stained carpets) or cheery (colourful linen). Campers will revel at the lovely

setting, in a shady garden, equipped with a well-scrubbed ablutions block.

Hotel Kervansaray (☎ 0416-737 2190; www.nemrutkervansaray.com; camp sites per person TL10, s/d with half-board TL60/90; 📍) Same brick walls, same setting and same family, the neighbouring Kervansaray is a carbon copy of the Euphrat. What sets it apart, though, is the smaller number of rooms (21). The rooms are a bit more appealing than at the Euphrat – or perhaps it's just the colourful bed linen? It has a restaurant with a kitsch, rustic interior, a pleasant camping ground and – don't get too excited – a 'swimming pool' (with stagnant water). Again, the owners can drive you to the summit (TL75 per minibus).

Hotel Euphrat (☎ 0416-737 2175; 0416-fax 737 2179; camp sites per person TL12, s/d with half-board TL60/90; 📍) With 52 rooms, the low-rise Euphrat has the largest capacity in the area and is popular with tour groups in peak season. It lacks atmosphere and rooms are a tad long in the tooth, but the views over the valley from the terrace are terrific. Yes, there's a 'pool', but the water looked

murky when we visited. The owners can drive you to the summit (TL75 per minibus).

Güneş Hotel (☎ 0544-459 4144, 0542-2720 0130; half-board per person TL55) Standing in Gothic isolation about 2.5km from the eastern terrace, in the valley below, this place is of use mostly to those coming up from Malatya. The setting is dramatic (bordering on spooky on a cloudy day), amid rocky boulders, the hush enjoyable and the rooms ordinary yet clean. The meals are disappointing, though.

Getting There & Away

CAR

To ascend the southern slopes of Nemrut from Kahta, you can drive along the D360 via Narince, or take a longer but more scenic route that includes Karakuş, Cendere, Eski Kahta and Arsameia, then the 15km short cut to the summit. Make sure you have fuel for at least 250km of normal driving. Though the trip to the summit and back is at most 160km, you have to drive some of that in low gear, which uses more fuel. Be prepared for the rough, steep last 3km up to the summit.

You can also approach the summit from Malatya (98km one way) and drive up to the Güneş Hotel – the road is surfaced and it's a very scenic drive. From there, a rough road leads to the eastern terrace, a further 2.5km – it's OK with a normal car in dry weather.

The question on your lips is: is it possible to drive from the southern side (the Kahta side) to the northern side (the Malatya side), or vice versa, which would avoid backtracking and the long detour via Adıyaman to travel between the two cities? The answer is yes, but don't get too excited, because it's a rough ride. From Kocahisar, a road skirts the base of Nemrut Dağı and goes 21km to the village of Büyüköz. The first 7km, up to the village of Kiran, are surfaced. The next 6km, on to the hamlet of Taşkale, deteriorate markedly and gradually become gravel; the last 8km, up to Büyüköz, are unsurfaced and the road is narrow and very steep (expect nerve-racking twists and turns). Don't brave it in wet weather and seek local advice at Kocahisar (if you're coming from Kahta and going to Malatya) or at Büyüköz (if you're doing Malatya–Kahta) before setting off.

TAXI & MINIBUS

There are three daily minibuses between Kahta and the Çeşme Pension, about 6km

from the summit. They stop at Karadut village (TL5) on the way. Pension owners can also pick you up at Kahta's otogar (but set the price beforehand).

All pensions and hotels can run you up to the summit and back, but don't expect anything in the way of guidance. The closer to the summit, the cheaper it will be. Hotels in Kahta charge about TL150 for a whole minibus (up to eight people), while Çeşme Pension charges only TL25.

MALATYA

☎ 0422 / pop 455,000 / elevation 964m

What percentage of *yabancı* (foreigners) that traverse central Anatolia en route to the eastern reaches of the country actually stop in Malatya? Definitely not enough.

Sure, it's rarely love at first sight – the architecture wins no prizes and sights are sparse. But look beneath the city's skin and the place will start to grow on you. Among Malatya's rewards are a bevy of verdant parks, tree-lined boulevards, chaotic bazaars, a studentlike atmosphere and the smug feeling that you're the only tourist for miles around. For cultural sustenance, you can head to the nearby historic site of Battalgazi.

Oh, and there's the *kayısı* (apricot). Malatya is Turkey's apricot capital. After the late-June harvest thousands of tonnes of the luscious fruit are shipped from here throughout the world.

Malatya is also the optimal launching pad for exploring the heart of Anatolia and the upper Euphrates, with a smattering of sights and villages that are easily accessible on a half-day or day trip, including Darende. Ah, Darende...

History

The Assyrians and Persians alternately conquered the city, and later the kings of Cappadocia and Pontus did the same. In 66 BC Pompey defeated Mithridates and took the town, then known as Melita. The Byzantines, Sassanids, Arabs and Danişmend *emirs* held it for a time until the coming of the Seljuks in 1105. Then came the Ottomans (1399), the armies of Tamerlane (1401), Mamluks, Dülkadr *emirs* and the Ottomans again (1515).

When the forces of Egypt's Mohammed Ali invaded Anatolia in 1839, the Ottoman forces garrisoned Malatya, leaving much of it in ruins on their departure. Later the resi-



cents returned and established a new city on the present site. You can visit the remains of old Malatya (Eski Malatya), now called Battalgazi, nearby.

Orientation

Malatya stretches for many kilometres along İnönü/Atatürk Caddesi, the main drag, but hotels, restaurants, banks and other services are clustered near the main square with its massive statue of İnönü.

The otogar is 4km west of the centre, just off the main highway, Turgut Özal Bulvarı. The train station is also on the outskirts, 2km west of the centre. City buses and minibuses marked 'Vilayet' operate between the station and the centre.

Information

There are branches of the main banks with ATMs on the main street. Internet outlets are plentiful in the centre.

Information booth (☎ 0535-760 5080; Atatürk Caddesi; ☎ 8am-7pm May-Sep) In the tea garden behind the tourist office – ask for Kemal – and managed by the Güneş Hotel (opposite). Good English is spoken.

Öz Murat Döviz (Atatürk Caddesi; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) A private exchange office right in the centre, keeps longer hours than banks.

Tourist office (☎ 323 2942; malatyakt@gmail.com; Atatürk Caddesi; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) This helpful office is on the ground floor of the *valiliği* (provincial government headquarters) in the heart of town. Ask for Bülent. It distributes a good town map and a useful brochure on the Malatya area. Good English is spoken.

Sights & Activities

No trip to Malatya would be complete without a stroll through the particularly vibrant **bazaar** that sprawls north from PTT Caddesi and the Malatya Büyük Otel. It's a great place to ramble through and get lost – which you will certainly do at least once. The large covered area is fascinating, especially the lively metalworking area, where the air is filled with hammering, sawing and welding. You'll probably be invited for a tea in the workshop in exchange for a few words. Want to buy a bag of apricots? Brush up your Turkish and wind your way to the *kayısı pazarı* or the *şire pazarı* (apricot market). Good luck!

BACKROADS: UPPER EUPHRATES

If you really want to get off the beaten track, you could venture into the upper valley of the Euphrates, from **Elazığ** to **Erzincan**. For adventurous types with plenty of time and their own wheels, this region offers an insight into a fascinating world that few Westerners have seen. You could start your trip with a visit to **Harput**, about 6km from Elazığ. The main attraction there is the huge but badly ruined castle astride a rocky outcrop. Other assorted historic buildings are scattered about, including the Ulu Cami, sporting a crooked minaret, and several mausoleums. Then you could head north to **Pertek** and follow the shores of the Keban Barajı via **Kemaliye** or **Tunceli**. It's a wonderful scenic drive; there are no primary roads, only secondary roads that serve intriguing towns and villages amid the undulating steppe, with mountain ranges as a backdrop. Allow two to three days to cover this suggested route.

Malatya's **museum** (Fuzuli Caddesi; admission TL2; ☎ 8am-5pm Tue-Sun), about 750m from the town centre, has finds from the excavations at Aslantepe (p626).

It's worth taking a stroll along Sinema Caddesi, which features a string of **old Malatyan houses**, five of which have recently been (over)restored.

Malatya also offers tours with an alternative way to approach Nemrut Dağı (p616).

Sleeping

Malatya has a smattering of good-value options, conveniently located in the bazaar and the centre. They are suitable for female travellers.

Malatya Büyük Otel (☎ 325 2828; fax 323 2828; Halep Caddesi, Yeni Cami Karşısı; s/d TL35/60; 🚻) This sharp-edged monolith behind the Yeni Cami wins no awards for character but sports serviceable (if a tad smallish) rooms with salubrious bathrooms and dashing views of the huge mosque across the street. The location is very handy – the bazaar is just one block behind – and the staff obliging. It's very quiet at night but due to the proximity of the mosque, be prepared for an early morning wake-up call.

Yeni Hotel (☎ 323 1423; yenihotel@turk.net; Yeni Cami Karşısı Zafer İşhanı; s/d TL35/60; 🚻) Quite transparently intended to rival the Malatya Büyük Otel just next door, this well-run establishment makes a pretty good fist of its attempt at competition, enlivening its rooms with pastel hues and electric blue bedspreads. Some rooms have laminated floors too. Keen shoppers should relish the location, right on the edge of the market area. It shares the same morning soundtrack as the Malatya Büyük – the strident call to prayer.

Hotel Yeni Sinan (☎ 321 2907; Atatürk Caddesi; s/d TL50/70) 'Soviet tenement' springs to mind upon first sight of the greyish, peeling facade, but

give this central abode a chance for it was undergoing a much-needed freshening up at the time of writing. When we checked in, brand-new mattresses were stacked next to the reception, which bodes well. The breakfast room boasts contemporary furnishings and a flat-screen TV.

Grand Akkoza Hotel (☎ 326 2727; www.grandakkozahotel.com; Çevre Yolu Üzeri Adliye Kavşağı; s/d TL75/110; 🚻 📺) This glass-fronted three-star venture provides a good level of comfort and service, and the sun-filled, capacious rooms boast pristine bathrooms, laminated floors, firm mattresses and a canary yellow colour scheme. There's also a hamam, sauna and gym. It's awkwardly placed (not so much if you're driving) on the busy ring road, but within easy access of the city centre.

Eating

Atatürk Caddesi is awash with inexpensive eateries, but there are funkier, more attractive options around. Kanal Boyu is a tree-lined boulevard divided by a canal and is the closest thing Malatya has to a hip area.

Serhent Simit Sarayı (İnönü Caddesi; simits from TL1) *Simit* aficionados, your search is over. This modern venture makes the best *simit*s in the city. The *peynirli* (*simit* with cheese) melts in the mouth.

Seviş (☎ 321 5188; Atatürk Caddesi; pastries from TL2) This pastry shop features a sleek, modern interior and a batch of mouth-watering deserts, including baklava and cakes. There's a welcoming *aile salonu* (family dining room) upstairs.

Mado (☎ 323 2346; Kanal Boyu; ice creams from TL3) The best outfit for enjoying an ice cream or a pastry in civilised surroundings. Also very central.

Mangal Vadisi (☎ 326 2200; Kışla Caddesi; mains TL4-10) Vegetarians, don't bother reading this

review: the huge *mangals* (barbecues) that take centre stage on the ground floor set the tone. This well-regarded restaurant is a beacon for bona fide carnivores, with a wide choice of grilled meat (chicken, lamb, liver and more). Great stuff. It's in a little street off Atatürk Caddesi.

Şelale Kernek Restaurant (☎ 323 9313; Kernek Meydanı; mains TL6-9) In summer the open-air rooftop overlooking verdant gardens is a winner. Otherwise the dining room is dull. The menu focuses on pide and grills, as well as trout in summer.

Sarı Kurdela Restaurant & Cafe (☎ 324 7724; İnönü Caddesi; mains TL6-10) This supertrendy joint ticks all the right boxes, with contemporary decor, efficient waiters (and waitresses) and an eclectic menu, including excellent ready-made meals, vegetarian dishes and a wide choice of sweets that will have you moaning for more. Don't miss it.

Hacıbey Lahmacun (☎ 324 9798; Kışla Caddesi; mains TL6-10) Hands down the best joint for a hearty pide or a *lahmacun* (pizza with a thin, crispy base topped with chopped lamb, onion and tomato), washed down with a refreshing *ayran*. The menu is translated into English, and there are photos of each kind of pide. The wood-panelled facade of the building looks like a Swiss chalet – very exotic for Malatya.

Drinking

Vilayet Çay Bahçesi – VIP Cafe (Vilayet Tea Garden; İnönü Caddesi; tea TL1, snacks TL3-7) This unexpected oasis of calm, behind the *vallığı*, is a good place to recharge the batteries. Nab a table at VIP Cafe and chow down on burgers or *gözleme* (thin savoury crêpes cooked with cheese, spinach or potato), or linger over a cuppa. No doubt you'll be approached by friendly Kemal, who runs the information booth nearby.

Semerkant (☎ 325 6031; Kanal Boyu; coffee TL2, mains TL3-7) Hmm! We can still smell the sweet aroma of nargileh wafting from the door. This relaxed café with a few amusing rustic touches (think fake stone walls and small wooden chairs) is a good place to imbibe the atmosphere of Kanal Boyu.

our pick Nostalji (☎ 323 4208; Müçelli Caddesi; coffee TL2, snacks TL4-7) No matter how hectic your day, as soon as you step inside this squeaky-boarded, old Malatya mansion complete with memorabilia, stress evaporates as fast as light drizzle on asphalt in summer. Soak up the cool karma in the light-filled main lounge while

listening to the mellow music and sipping a cup of Turkish coffee. Simple dishes are also available. It's also a good place to meet students of both sexes.

Shopping

You won't leave Malatya without filling your bags with apricots, the city's delight. There's a handful of dried-fruit shops specialising in apricot baskets, jams and pickles on Atatürk Caddesi but nothing beats a shopping session in the *şire pazarı* (see p623).

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is 35km northwest of the centre. All companies operate an airport bus (TL7).

Onur Air (☎ 326 5050; www.onurair.com.tr; İnönü Caddesi; ✈ 8am-8pm) One daily flight to/from İstanbul (from TL112, 1½ hours). Also an agent for Sun Express.

Sun Express (www.sunexpress.com.tr) Has three weekly flights to/from İzmir (from TL109, 1½ hours).

Turkish Airlines (☎ 324 8001; www.thy.com; Kanal Boyu; ✈ 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1.30pm Sat) Two daily flights to/from İstanbul (from TL114), and a daily flight to/from Ankara (from TL59, one hour).

BUS

Malatya's enormous otogar, MAŞTİ, is 4km out on the western outskirts. Most bus companies operate *servises* (shuttle minibuses) there from the town centre. If not, minibuses from the otogar travel along Turgut Özal Bulvarı/Buhara Bulvarı (aka Çevre Yol). However, they aren't allowed into the town centre. Ask to be let off at the corner of Turan Temelli and Buhara Caddesi and walk from there. City buses to the otogar leave from near the *vilayet*. A taxi to the otogar costs about TL15.

Some daily bus services to major destinations are listed in the table, p626.

CAR

Car-hire agencies are clustered just west of the Tekel Factory on İnönü Caddesi. **Meydan Rent a Car** (☎ 325 3434; www.meydanoto.com.tr, in Turkish; İnönü Caddesi, Sırtmapınarı Ziraat Bankası Bitişiği; ✈ 8am-7pm) is a reliable outlet. The tourist office can also arrange car rental.

TRAIN

Right in the middle of Turkey, Malatya is a major railway hub and is well connected by train to the east of the country (Elazığ, Tatvan, Diyarbakır), the west (İstanbul, Ankara, Sivas,

SERVICES FROM MALATYA'S OTOGAR

Destination	Fare (TL)	Duration (hr)	Distance (km)	Frequency (per day)
Adana	25	8	425	a few
Adiyaman	15	2½	144	frequent
Ankara	45	11	685	frequent
Diyarbakır	20	4	260	a few
Elazığ	8	1¾	101	hourly
Gaziantep	20	4	250	a few
Istanbul	50	18	1130	a few
Kayseri	25	4	354	several
Sivas	20	5	235	several

Kayseri) and the south (Adana). A train via here can be a good alternative to tiring bus trips.

The *Vangölü Ekspresi* leaves for İstanbul via Sivas, Kayseri and Ankara on Tuesday and Sunday (TL25); for Elazığ and Tatvan (TL11), it leaves on Wednesday and Sunday.

The *Güney Ekspresi* leaves for İstanbul via Sivas, Kayseri and Ankara on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday (TL25); for Elazığ and Diyarbakır (TL12), it departs on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday.

The *4 Eylül Ekspresi* leaves daily for Ankara via Sivas and Kayseri (TL25).

The *Firat Ekspresi* leaves daily for Adana (TL16) and for Elazığ (TL6).

Check at the train station for exact departure times of all trains.

Malatya's train station can be reached by minibus (TL1) or by 'İstasyon' city buses from near the *valiliği*.

AROUND MALATYA

Aslantepe

The scant finds of this archaeological site, about 6km from Malatya, are not exactly gripping, but if you have an interest in Anatolian archaeology you'll enjoy **Aslantepe** (☞ 8am-5pm) and its pretty village setting.

When the Phrygians invaded the Hittite kingdom at Boğazkale, around 1200 BC, many Hittites fled southeast over the Taurus Mountains to resettle and build walled cities. The city of Milidia, now known as Aslantepe, was one of these neo-Hittite city-states (for more information about the Hittites, see boxed text, p464).

On-off excavations since the 1930s have so far uncovered seven layers of remains.

To get to Aslantepe from Malatya, catch a bus marked 'Orduzu' (TL1, 15 minutes) from the southern side of Buhara Bulvarı near the

junction with Akpınar Caddesi. Buy an extra ticket for the return trip, and tell the driver where you want to get off; the site is a pleasant 500m stroll from the bus stop.

Battalgazi (Old Malatya)

You don't need to be an archaeology buff to be captivated by the remains of old Malatya, the walled city settled alongside Aslantepe, about 11km north of Malatya at Battalgazi.

As you come into the village you'll see the ruins of the old **city walls** with their 95 towers, built during Roman times and completed in the 6th century. They've lost all their facing stone to other building projects, and apricot orchards now fill what were once city blocks. The village of Battalgazi has grown in and around the ruins.

The bus from Malatya terminates in the main square. Just off here, beside the mosque boasting the smooth-topped minaret, is the **Silahtar Mustafa Paşa Hanı**, an Ottoman caravanserai dating from the 17th century. Although restored, it's virtually abandoned.

When you've finished at the caravanserai, turn right and follow Osman Ateş Caddesi for about 600m until you see the broken brick minaret of the finely restored 13th-century **Ulu Cami** on the left. This is what you've really come to see. This stunning, if fast-fading, Seljuk building dates from the reign of Alaettin Keykubad I. Note the remaining Seljuk tiles lining the dome over the *mimber* (pulpit) and worked into Arabic inscriptions on the *evvan* and *medrese* (seminary) walls. Also worthy of interest is the **Ak Minare Camii** (White Minaret Mosque), about 50m from the Ulu Cami. This also dates from the 13th century.

Close by is the 13th-century **Halfetih Minaret**, made completely of bricks, and the **Nezir Gazi Tomb**.

Buses to Battalgazi (TL1, 15 minutes) leave every 15 minutes or so from the same bus stop in Malatya as those for Aslantepe.

Yeşilyurt & Gündüzbey

In summer, it's a true pleasure to enjoy the refreshingly peaceful atmosphere of Yeşilyurt and Gündüzbey, respectively 9km and 11km from Malatya. Old houses, lots of greenery, pleasing tea gardens, picnic areas...so cool! Take a minibus from Milli Eğemenlik Caddesi in Malatya (TL1, 20 minutes) and enjoy the hush.

DİYARBAKIR

☎ 0412 / pop 665,400 / elevation 660m

Filled with heart, soul and character, Diyar has recently realised that its tourism potential is fantastic and it's time to tap into it. While it's proud of remaining the symbol of Kurdish identity and tenacity, these days the city also wants to grab a piece of the tourism pie. Thanks to increasing promotion and restoration programs, Turkish and foreign tourists are streaming back, lured by the city's architectural mix. Behind the grim basalt walls, the

old city is crammed full of historical buildings and Arab-style mosques. Stroll along the narrow, twisting alleyways and soak up the uniquely unforgettable ambience.

Speak to Turks from western Turkey and they will recoil in fear if you mention Diyarbakır because, since the 1980s, this animated city has been the centre of the Kurdish resistance movement and violent street demonstrations still occur from time to time. And yes, nowhere else in eastern Turkey will you hear people priding themselves so much on being Kurdish.

Banned until a few years ago, the Nevruz festival takes place on 21 March and is a great occasion to immerse yourself in Kurdish culture. For more details, see p662.

Apart from a few street kids, some of whom might harass foreigners, Diyarbakır is as safe as any other city in the region. You only need a little common sense and street savvy to enjoy yourself without any problems.

History

Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Valleys, saw the dawn of the world's

DETOUR TO DARENDE – THE FORGOTTEN OASIS

Who knows if the utterly mellow town of Darende, about 110km west of Malatya, will be able to handle all this publicity, but it can't go without mention because it's a terrific place to kick off your shoes for a day or two in a fabulous setting. Darende itself won't knock your socks off but it has a splendid canyon right on its doorstep as well as a smattering of well-preserved architectural treasures, including the **Somuncu Baba Camii ve Külliyesi** (with a museum), the **Kudret Havuzu**, a purpose-built rock pool set in the **Tohma Canyon**, near the Sumuncu Baba Camii, and the **Zengibar Kalesi**, perched on a rocky outcrop.

Few things could be more pleasurable than tucking into a fresh trout in one of the few restaurants that have been set up along the riverbank in the canyon. **Hasbahçe** (☎ 0422-615 2215; Somuncu Baba Camii Civarı; mains TL5-10) is a firm favourite – the fish is so fresh it could jump off your plate. Or you could picnic in one of the numerous sheltered *köşk* (picnic areas). In summer, you can dunk yourself in the Kudret Havuzu – just blissful. Action seekers, rejoice: **rafting** is also available in the Tohma Canyon in summer.

The brilliant-value **Tiryandafil Otel** (☎ 0422-615 3095; s/d TL40/70; 📶 📺) is conveniently located on the outskirts of Darende, about 1km before the canyon and monuments. It has impeccable, commodious rooms with the requisite mod cons. The on-site restaurant is a winner, with excellent local specialities – try the *şelale sızdırma* (meat with melted cheese, mushrooms and butter) – but it's not licensed. Ask for Hassan, who speaks good English and will help you with any queries.

With your own wheels, you can easily reach the **Gürpınar Şelalesi** (waterfalls), about 7km from Darende (from the hotel, follow the road to Ankara for 6km; then it's signposted). Don't expect Niagara-like falls, but it's an excellent picnic spot.

Regular buses (TL10) and minibuses (TL7) ply the route between Malatya and Darende. In Malatya, they depart from the minibus terminal (also known as 'Eski Otogar') on Çevre Yol.

Darende is popular with Turkish families at weekends, and one thing is sure: you'll be the only *yabancı* (foreigner) for miles around. Enjoy!

first great empires. So it's no surprise that Diyarbakır's history begins with the Hurrian kingdom of Mitanni around 1500 BC and proceeds through domination by the civilisations of Urartu (900 BC), Assyria (1356–612 BC), Persia (600–330 BC) and Alexander the Great and his successors, the Seleucids.

The Romans took over in AD 115, but because of its strategic position the city changed hands numerous times until it was conquered by the Arabs in 639. The Arab tribe of Beni Bakr that settled here named their new home Diyar Bakr, which means the Realm of Bakr.

For the next few centuries the city was occupied by various tribes, until 1497 when the Safavid dynasty founded by Shah İsmail took over Iran, putting an end to more than a century of Turkoman rule in this area. The Ottomans came and conquered in 1515, but even then, Diyarbakır was not to know lasting peace. Because it stood right in the way of invading armies originating from Anatolia, Persia and Syria, it suffered many more tribulations.

Orientation & Information

Old Diyarbakır is encircled by walls pierced by several main gates. Within the walls the city is a maze of narrow, twisting, mostly unmarked alleys. New Diyarbakır sprawls to the northwest of the old city, but you'll have no reason to go there, as most services useful to travellers are in Old Diyarbakır, on or around Gazi Caddesi, including the PTT, internet cafés and banks with ATMs.

Nazlı Saray Döviz (Gazi Caddesi; ☎ 8am–7pm Mon–Sat) Private exchange office that keeps longer hours than banks.

Tourism information bureau (☎ 9am–noon & 1–6pm Tue–Sat) Municipal office, off Kibris Caddesi. Has brochures and can help with simple queries.

Tourist office (☎ 228 1706; Kapısı; ☎ 8am–5pm Mon–Fri) Provincial office housed in a tower of the wall. Also has brochures and can help with simple queries.

Sights

CITY WALLS & GATES

Diyarbakır's single most conspicuous feature is its great circuit of basalt walls, probably dating from Roman times, although the present walls date from early Byzantine times (AD 330–500). At almost 6km in length these walls are said to be second in extent only to the Great Wall of China. They make a striking sight whether you're walking along the top or the bottom.

Numerous bastions and towers stand sentinel over the massive black walls. There were originally four main gates: **Harput Kapısı** (north), **Mardin Kapısı** (south), **Yenikapı** (east) and **Urfa Kapısı** (west).

Fortunately, the most easily accessible stretch of walls is also the most interesting in terms of inscriptions and decoration. Start near the Mardin Kapısı close to the Deliller Han, a stone caravanserai now home to the Otel Büyük Kervansaray. Be sure not to miss **Nur Burcu** (Tower Nur), the **Yedi Kardeş Burcu** (Tower of Seven Brothers), with two Seljuk lion bas-reliefs, which you can see only from outside the walls, and the **Malikşah Burcu** (Tower of Malik Şah, also called Ulu Badan), which has some bas-reliefs too.

You can also ascend the walls of the **İç Kale** (keep) to enjoy the fine views of the Tigris, flanked by a patchwork of market gardens. The İç Kale was being restored at the time of writing and should be one of the most attractive parts of the city walls when it's completed.

At various spots inside the base of the walls you can see brightly painted, open-air **Sufi sarcophagi**, notable for their turbans – their size is a symbol of spiritual authority. There's a cluster a few hundred metres northeast of the Urfa Kapısı.

Unfortunately, you must be careful when walking on and along the walls as there have been reports of attempted robberies. Try to go in a group.

MOSQUES

Of Diyarbakır's many mosques, the most impressive is the **Ulu Cami**, built in 1091 by Malik Şah, an early Seljuk sultan. Incorporating elements from an earlier Byzantine church on the site, it was extensively restored in 1155 after a fire. It's rectangular in plan – Arab style, rather than Ottoman. The entrance portal, adorned with two medallions figuring a lion and a bull, leads to a huge courtyard. This is the most elegant section of the building, with two-storey arcades, two cone-shaped **şadırvans** (ritual ablutions fountains), elaborate pillars, and friezes featuring fruits and vegetables – a real feast for the eyes.

Across Gazi Caddesi is the **Hasan Paşa Hanı**, a 16th-century caravanserai occupied by carpet shops and souvenir sellers. It was extensively restored in 2006.

is even more interesting – the tower stands on four slender pillars about 2m high, earning it the name *Dört Ayaklı Minare* (Four-Legged Minaret).

The 12th-century **Hazreti Süleyman Camii**, beside the *İç Kale*, is particularly revered because it houses the tombs of heroes of past Islamic wars. Local people flock here on Thursdays to pay their respects.

Note that most of these mosques have more than one name; the alternative names are shown on the map key. When visiting these mosques, you should try to time your visit for 20 to 25 minutes after the call to prayer (when the prayers should be finished), as most of them will be locked outside prayer times.

ARCHAEOLOGY MUSEUM

Diyarbakır's **Archaeology Museum** (Arkeoloji Müzesi; admission TL2; ☎ 8am–5pm Tue–Sun) is near the *Fuar Sahası* (Fairgrounds), off *Elazığ Caddesi* and behind the towering *Dedeman Hotel*.

It has a well-presented collection including finds from the Neolithic site of *Çayönü* (7500–6500 BC), 65km north of Diyarbakır. There's also a decent Urartian collection and relics from the *Karakoyunlu* and *Akkoyunlu*, powerful tribal dynasties that ruled much of eastern Anatolia and Iran between 1378 and 1502. Labels in English are a great help.

GAZİ KÖŞKÜ & ON GÖZLÜ KÖPRÜSÜ

About 1km south of the *Mardin Kapısı*, the **Gazi Köşkü** (admission TL1) is a fine example of the sort of Diyarbakır house to which its wealthier citizens would retire in high summer. The house dates from the time of the 15th-century *Akkoyunlu* Turkoman dynasty and stands in a well-tended park, very popular with picnicking families at weekends. It's open whenever the caretaker can be found, and you should leave him a tip for showing you around.

To get there, it's a pleasant, if rather isolated, downhill walk. Taxis charge TL10. From this side of the city you get fine, unimpeded views of Diyarbakır's dramatic walls.

About 2km further south, the 11th-century **On Gözlü Köprüsü** (Ten-Eyed Bridge) is also worth a look.

DIYARBAKIR HOUSE MUSEUMS

Old Diyarbakır houses were made of black basalt and decorated with stone stencilling. They were divided into summer and winter quarters, and the centre of the summer

part was always the *eyvan*, a vaulted room opening onto the courtyard with a fountain in the centre. In summer, the family moved high wooden platforms called *tahts* into the courtyard for sleeping, making it possible to catch any breeze.

The best way to see inside one of these old houses is to visit one of the museums inside the city walls. For example, the poet *Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı* (1910–56) was born in a two-storey black basalt house built in 1820, in a side street about 50m north of the *Ulu Cami*. It now houses the **Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı Museum** (*Ziya Gökalp Sokak*; admission free; ☎ 8am–5pm Tue–Sun), which contains some of the poet's personal effects and furnishings.

The beautiful grey-and-white-striped **Esma Ocak Evi**, not far from the *Dört Ayaklı Minare*, was built in 1899 by an Armenian and restored in 1996 by a female writer, *Esma Ocak*. You'll need to bang hard on the door to alert the caretaker, who will show you the gracefully furnished living rooms. Admission is by donation, but you'll be encouraged to give at least TL2 per person. While you're there ask the caretaker to show you the Armenian *Surpağab Kilisesi* opposite (see below).

CHURCHES

The population of Diyarbakır once included many Christians, mainly Armenians and Chaldeans, but most of them were pushed out or perished during the troubles in the early 20th century or, more recently, with the *Hezbollah*. Only their churches linger as reminders.

The **Keldani Kilisesi** (Chaldean Church), off *Yenikapı Caddesi*, is a plain, brightly lit church, still used by 30 Christian families of the Syrian rite (in communion with the Roman Catholic Church). The chaplain from the *Meryem Ana Kilisesi* holds a service here on the second Sunday of the month. It's fairly easy to find on your own. Walk past the detached minaret of the *Şeyh Mutahhar Camii*, take the first left (*Dicle Sokak*) then the first right (*Şeftali Sokak*). The caretaker usually sits outside the *Nebi Camii*.

The Armenian **Surpağab Kilisesi**, also just off *Yenikapı Caddesi*, has long been grass-infested since the roof caved in, but it's well worth visiting. Bang on the blue doors if it's closed.

The wonderful **Meryem Ana Kilisesi** (Church of the Virgin Mary) is still used by Orthodox Syrian Christians; they are Jacobites, or

Monophysites, who refused to accept the doctrine laid down at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. This stated that Jesus had two natures, being simultaneously fully divine and fully human – the Monophysites insisted he had only one divine nature. The church is beautifully maintained, although only about seven families still attend services. You will have to hammer on the door as the custodian lives two courtyards away and may not hear you.

Inside the İç Kale, the **St George Church** was being restored at the time of writing.

Other churches have found new uses, including the **old church** near the Dört Ayaklı Camii, now a PTT.

Sleeping

Most accommodation options are conveniently located on Kıbrıs Caddesi and the nearby İnönü Caddesi, where there's a range of hotels in all price brackets interspersed with restaurants. In summer it's scorching hot here, something to bear in mind when choosing a room. The best accommodation choices for lone female guests are Hotel Birkent, the Balkar Otel and the top-end options.

BUDGET

Aslan Palas (☎ 228 9224; fax 223 9880; Kıbrıs Caddesi; s/d TL20/30; ♿) A worthwhile back-up for cash-strapped (male) travellers. A few broken tiles in the bathrooms and ageing plumbing may raise a few eyebrows, but that's about the worst surprise you'll get. Air-con is in all the rooms. Prices don't include breakfast, but you'll find several *kahvaltı salonu* (eateries specialising in full Turkish breakfasts) on the street.

Hotel Surkent (☎ 228 1014; İzzet Paşa Caddesi; s/d TL30/45; ♿) Tangerine frames and aluminium plates on the facade, flamingo-pink walls, technicolour bed linen and flashy orange curtains: the owners of the Surkent certainly like your life to be colourful. The top-floor rooms boast good views (for singles, rooms 501, 502 and 503 are the best). It's in a peaceful street, close to everything. One downside: there's no lift – good to know if your backpack weighs a tonne.

Hotel Güler (☎ /fax 224 0294; Yoğurtçu Sokak; s/d TL30/45; ♿) Tucked in an alleyway off Kıbrıs Caddesi, this two-star outfit has impersonal yet well-looked-after rooms, good mattresses and prim, if pint-sized, bathrooms.

Hotel Aslan (☎ 224 7096; fax 224 1179; Kıbrıs Caddesi; s/d TL35/50; ♿) '*Her gün temizlik yapıyoruz*' ('We

do the cleaning everyday'), staff told us. And it shows. Next door to the Palas, the Aslan stands its ground with bright rooms, clean linen and bathrooms you won't dread using.

Hotel Birkent (☎ 228 7131; fax 228 7145; İnönü Caddesi; s/d TL40/60; ♿) We saw a few female travellers at this hotel, which is a good sign. With its neat bathrooms, spotless rooms, turquoise bedspreads, convenient location and copious breakfast, the Birkent makes for a cost-effective base from which to explore Diyar.

Grand Güler Hotel (☎ 229 2221; fax 224 4509; Kıbrıs Caddesi; s/d TL40/60) The billet of choice for tour groups, the Güler is not *that* grand but its blue mosaic facade brings a touch of fancy to an otherwise dull street. A recent coat of (baby-pink) paint has spruced-up the rooms, which are well equipped and serviceable. The front rooms have double-glazing so it shouldn't be too noisy.

MIDRANGE

Balkar Otel (☎ 228 6306; fax 224 6936; Kıbrıs Caddesi 38; s/d TL50/80; ♿) This typical middling three-star boasts well-appointed rooms with TV and minibar. Bathroom-wise, don't even think of gesticulating in the cramped cubicles in the single rooms. Added bonuses include a lift, a hearty breakfast and a rooftop terrace that proffers stunning views over the walls.

Büyük Otel (☎ 228 1295; fax 221 2444; İnönü Caddesi; TL60/80; ♿) If you want no surprises and no hassles, you'll strike gold at the Büyük. Service is everything it should be – no more, no less – while the unadventurous, motel-style rooms are exactly what you'd expect. A reliable option for women travellers.

ourpick Otel Büyük Kervansaray (☎ 228 7131; fax 228 7145; Gazi Caddesi; s/d/ste TL80/120/250; ♿) This is your chance to sleep in the 16th-century Deliller Han, a converted caravanserai. This is not the height of luxury, but it scores high on amenities, with a restaurant, a bar, a hamam and a nifty pool in which to cool off. The standard rooms are itty-bitty, but how much time are you going to spend in your room when the inner courtyard is so agreeable?

TOP END

Class Hotel (☎ 229 5000; www.diyarbakirclasshotel.com, in Turkish; Gazi Caddesi; s/d TL220/320; ♿) Tired and jaded from so much travelling? Or just overweight from all those squishy baklava? Work it off at this five-star bigwig that comes

with a fully equipped gym, a sauna, a hamam and even a swimming pool. You'd never guess it from the outside, but this Manhattan-esque building in the heart of the old town has a well-kept secret: the Çizmeçi Köşkü, a traditional house that's been renovated and integrated into the hotel's premises, with several small Ottoman-style lounges where guests can relax. A neat surprise.

Eating

A stroll along Kıbrıs Caddesi reveals plenty of informal places to eat. They're nothing fancy, but they offer authentic fare at very moderate prices.

Şafak Kahvaltısı & Yemek Salonu (Kıbrıs Caddesi; mains TL5-8) Nosh on freshly prepared meat dishes and expertly cooked pide in this brisk Diyarbakır institution, ideally positioned on Kıbrıs Caddesi. It's also a good place to partake in a restorative morning breakfast.

Şanlıurfa Kebap ve Lahmacun Evi (☎ 228 2312; İzzet Paşa Caddesi; mains TL5-10; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Sat) Slip into this neat restaurant and hoe into well-executed kebabs and pide.

Otel Büyük Kervansaray (☎ 228 7131; Gazi Caddesi; mains TL5-10) Even if you're not staying in this historic hotel it's worth popping in for a meal in the restaurant, which is a converted camel stable. There's live music here most nights and, joy of joys, it's licensed.

Küce Başı Et Lokantası (☎ 229 5661; Kıbrıs Caddesi; mains TL6-10) A few doors away from most hotels, this outfit gets kudos for its wide-ranging menu and original setting – the room at the back is designed like a rustic barn. Try innovative dishes like *tavuk tava* (deep-fried chicken meat in a flat-bottomed pan). There's a picture menu to facilitate your choice.

our pick **Selim Amca'nın Sofra Salonu** (☎ 224 4447; Ali Emiri Caddesi; mains TL6-12, set menu TL19) This bright eatery outside the city walls is famous for its *kaburga dolması* (lamb or chicken stuffed with rice and almonds). Round it off with a devilish *İrmik helvası* (a gooey dessert). Hardly the foodstuff of Heart Foundation ticks but undeniably delicious. If only alcohol was served!

Other recommendations:

Aslan Yemek Salonu (Kıbrıs Caddesi; mains TL4-9) An excellent-value stomach-filler, with a wide selection of meat dishes.

Kebapçı Hacı Halid (Borsahan Sokak; mains TL5-10) The ideal pit stop if money matters. Tasty kebabs and ready-made meals served in bright surroundings. Look

for the black-and-white pictures of old Diyarbakır on the 1st floor. It's in a small pedestrianised side street off Gazi Caddesi.

Şeyhmus Tatlıcısı (Kıbrıs Caddesi; ☎ 7am-8pm) Keep up your strength with a delectable *baklava* or a sticky *kadayıf* (dough soaked in syrup).

Drinking

The delightful courtyard of the **Otel Büyük Kervansaray** (☎ 228 7131; Gazi Caddesi) is a great place to unwind over a cup of tea and take in the atmosphere. There's also a smattering of appealing teahouses in the recently restored Hasan Paşa Hanı (see p628).

Getting There & Away

AIR

There is no airport service; a taxi from the town centre to the airport will cost about TL15.

Onur Air (☎ 223 5312; www.onurair.com.tr; Gevran Caddesi, Rızvan Ağa Sokak; ☎ 8am-7pm) Has two daily flights to/from Istanbul (from TL110).

Pegasus Airlines (www.flypgs.com) Has four weekly flights to/from Izmir (from TL100), six weekly flights to/from Ankara (from TL100) and a daily flight to/from Istanbul (from TL100).

Sun Express (www.sunexpress.com.tr) Has five weekly flights to Izmir (from TL100, two hours), three weekly flights to Antalya (from TL100), two weekly flights to Bursa (from TL110) and four weekly flights to Istanbul (from TL100).

Turkish Airlines (☎ 228 8393; www.thy.com; İnönü Caddesi; ☎ 8am-7pm) Has two daily flights to/from Istanbul (from TL114) and two daily flights to/from Ankara (from TL109). Also represents Sun Express and Pegasus Airlines.

BUS

Many bus companies have ticket offices on İnönü Caddesi or along Gazi Caddesi near the Dağ Kapısı. The otogar is about 14km from the centre, on the road to Urfa (about TL20 by taxi).

There's a separate minibus terminal (İlçe Garajı) about 1.5km southwest of the city walls, with services to Batman (TL7, 1½ hours), Elazığ (TL10, two hours), Mardin (TL7, 1½ hours), Malatya (TL15, five hours), Midyat (TL10) and Siverek (to get to Kahta without going right round the lake via Adıyaman). For Hasankeyf, change in Batman. To get to the minibus terminal, take a bus from near the Balkar Otel, across the street, and ask for 'İlçe Garajı' (TL1), or take a taxi (TL10).

SERVICES FROM DİYARBAKIR'S OTOGAR

Destination	Fare (TL)	Duration (hr)	Distance (km)	Frequency (per day)
Adana	35	8	550	several
Ankara	55	13	945	several
Batman	7	1½	85	frequent minibuses
Erzurum	30	8	485	several
Malatya	20	5	260	frequent
Mardin	7	1½	95	hourly
Şanlıurfa	15	3	190	frequent
Sivas	30	10	500	several
Tatvan	20	4	264	several
Van	30	7	410	several

For Iraq, take a bus to Cizre (TL17, four hours) or Silopi (TL20, five hours) from the main otogar. There are about four services per day. See boxed text, p635, for more details.

Details of some daily services on the main routes are listed in the table, above.

CAR

There is an **Avis** (☎ 236 1324, 229 0275; www.avis.com.tr; Elazığ Caddesi; ☎ 8am-7pm) office across the street from the *belediye* and at the airport.

TRAIN

The train station is about 1.5km from the centre, at the western end of İstasyon Caddesi. The *Güney Ekspresi* leaves for İstanbul via Malatya, Sivas and Kayseri at 11.36am on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

MARDİN

☎ 0482 / pop 55,000 / elevation 1325m

Pretty-as-a-picture Mardin is a highly addictive, unmissable spot to slap your backpack down. No doubt you'll ooohh and aaahh over its fabulous setting, breathtaking layout and wealth of architectural treasures. With its minarets poking out of a baked brown labyrinth of lanes, its old castle dominating the old city and the honey-coloured stone houses that cling to the hillside, Mardin emerges like a phoenix from the roasted Mesopotamian plains.

Another draw is the mosaic of people. As a melting pot of Kurdish, Yezidi, Christian and Syrian cultures, among others, it has a fascinating social mix.

Don't expect to have the whole place to yourself, though. With daily flights from İstanbul and lots of positive coverage in the Turkish media over the last few years, Mardin is no longer a sleeping beauty. You

will come across lots of Turkish tour groups in summer.

If you really want something extra special, take a little detour to Dara or, better still, Savur (but you didn't hear it from us...).

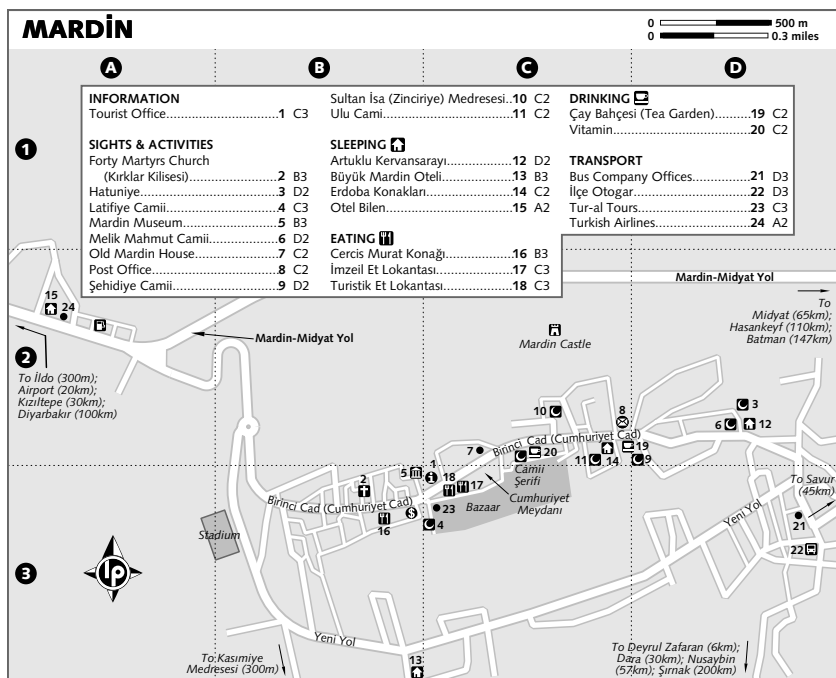
History

As with Diyarbakır, Mardin's history is one of disputes between rival armies over millennia, though in recent years the only dispute that anyone has really cared about was the one between the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) and the government. A castle has stood on this hill from time immemorial, and the Turkish army still finds the site useful.

Assyrian Christians settled here during the 5th century, and the Arabs occupied Mardin between 640 and 1104. After that, it had a succession of Seljuk Turkish, Kurdish, Mongol and Persian overlords, until the Ottomans under Sultan Selim the Grim took it in 1517. In the early 20th century many of the Assyrian Christians were pushed out or perished during the troubles, and in the last few decades many have emigrated. An estimated 600 Christians remain, with 11 churches still in use on a rotational basis.

Orientation & Information

Coming from Diyarbakır, you first pass through the new part of Mardin, where you'll find the Otel Bilen. From here the main road winds up a hill. Continue up the hill to the roundabout where the road forks. Go uphill to the main drag, Cumhuriyet Caddesi (still called by its former name, Birinci Caddesi), to find the hotels and the main square, Cumhuriyet Meydanı, with the statue of Atatürk. The right-hand road from the roundabout, Yeni Yol, curves round the hillside on a



lower latitude to rejoin Cumhuriyet Caddesi, just north of the İlçe Otogar.

Everything you'll need, including banks with ATMs and internet cafés, is along or just off Cumhuriyet Caddesi, a one-way street with minibuses running along it.

The **tourist office** (Cumhuriyet Caddesi; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm), right in the centre of town, has a few brochures.

Sights

Mardin's most obvious attraction is the rambling **bazaar** that parallels Cumhuriyet Caddesi one block down the hill. Here donkeys are still the main form of transport, and are decked out in all the finery you sometimes see on sale in carpet shops. Look out also for saddle repairers who seem to be able to restore even the shabbiest examples.

Strolling through the bazaar, keep your eyes open for the secluded **Ulu Camii**, a 12th-century Iraqi Seljuk structure that suffered badly during the Kurdish rebellion of 1832. Inside it's fairly plain, but the delicate reliefs adorning the minaret make a visit worthwhile.

Mardin Museum (Mardin Müzesi; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; admission TL2; ☎ 8am-5pm), prominently positioned on the main drag, is worth visiting for the late-19th-century building alone. This superbly restored mansion sports carved pillars and elegant arcades on the upper floor. Inside, it has a small but well-displayed collection including a finely detailed 7th-century BC Assyrian vase and finds from Gırnavaz, a Bronze Age site 4km north of Nusaybin. Afterwards, head east along Cumhuriyet Caddesi, keeping your eye out for a fabulous example of Mardin's domestic architecture on your left – the three-arched facade of an ornately carved **house**.

Continue east, looking for steps on the left (north) that lead to the **Sultan İsa (Zinciriyе) Medresesi** (☎ daylight hours), dating from 1385 and the town's prime architectural attraction. The highlight is the imposing recessed doorway, but make sure you wander through the pretty courtyards, lovingly tended by the caretaker, and onto the roof to enjoy the cityscape.

Further east is what surely must be Turkey's most gorgeous **post office**, housed in a 17th-century caravanserai with carvings such as

frills around the windows and teardrops in stone dripping down the walls – shame they added the clunky staircase! Across the street you can't miss the elegant, slender minaret of the 14th-century **Şehidiye Camii**. It's superbly carved, with colonnades all around, and three small bulbs superimposed at the summit. The base of the minaret sports a series of pillars.

Also worth visiting is the 14th-century **Latifiye Camii**, behind the Akbank, where a shady courtyard has a *şadırvan* in the middle. The 15th-century **Forty Martyrs Church** (Kırklar Kilisesi; Sağlık Sokak) is to the west, with the martyrs depicted above the doorway of the church as you enter. If it's closed, bang hard on the door to alert the caretaker. Services are held here each Sunday. In the vicinity of the Artuklu Kervansarayı, the eye-catching **Hatuniye** and nearby **Melik Mahmut Camii** have been recently restored.

Another striking sight, the **Kasimiye Medresesi**, 800m south of Yeni Yol, was built in 1469. Two domes stand over the tombs of Kasım Paşa and his sister, but the highlights are the sublime courtyard walled with arched colonnades and the magnificent, carved doorway. Upstairs, you can see the students' quar-

ters, before ascending the stairs to the rooftop for another great Mardin panorama.

Sleeping

You're dead right: for such a tourist hot spot, there aren't many options, especially if you're on a budget.

Otel Bilem (☎ 213 0315; fax 212 2575; Yenişehir, s/d TL60/120; 📶) The Bilem is a safe albeit unsexy choice in the new part of Mardin (Yenişehir), 2km northwest of Cumhuriyet Meydanı. Although the facade and the lobby were renovated (the rooms also were to be refurbished), there's no disguising the fact that, architecturally speaking, this is no beauty queen – its boxy concrete frame boasts comfortable modern facilities but little personality. Still, it's often full to the brim with tour groups.

Artuklu Kervansarayı (☎ 213 7353; www.artuklu.com; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; s/d TL90/140; 📶) Quirky, there's no doubt about it: dark floorboards and furniture, stone walls, sturdy wooden doors...you'll feel like you're in a castle. We're not quite sure how to take the Artuklu (which bills itself as a 'boutique hotel'), but at least it broke the mould when it conceived the 'medieval' interior of this venture. It sports a wide

GETTING TO KURDISH IRAQ

Yes, it's possible, but don't tell your family – they'd be worried sick, even though the crossing of the Turkish–Iraqi border at Habur, 15km southeast of Silopi (reached by bus from Mardin or Diyarbakır via Cizre), is pretty straightforward, and safe. At Silopi's otogar, you'll soon realise that crossing the border is a well-organised business that's in the hands of the local taxi mafia. For TL60 (or the equivalent in euros or US dollars), a taxi driver will handle all formalities up to the Iraqi border post. Going through Turkish immigration and customs is quick (no queues), and few questions are asked. Then the taxi drives you to the Ibrahim Halil border post (the Iraqi side), over the bridge on the Tigris. Here too, we found the border crossing process fairly harmless. You might be asked for a place to stay in Iraq; just mention any hotel in Zakho or Dohuk (such as the Birjin). Then you just have to take one of the Iraqi (well, Kurdish) taxis that wait in a car park just outside customs. In total, it took us less than an hour.

It had to be too good to be true. The next day, after having spent the night in Dohuk, we crossed the border in the reverse direction. And this was not quite the same story. One of the Turkish taxi drivers, who was waiting on the Iraqi side (they are allowed to), offered to drive us back to Silopi for the usual amount (TL60). Here comes the glitch: while we were standing with him at the immigration counter, he got back to his car for a few minutes, only to stuff our backpack (which we had left in the car) with smuggled cigarettes... Aaargh! We quickly unpacked everything to check if other forbidden stuff (remember *Midnight Express*?) had been placed in the bag. Smuggling is taken very seriously at the Turkish customs, as we realised. Customs officers dutifully searched all cars, removing bumpers, upholstery etc. Luggage was scanned. There was palpable tension in the air. After two hours (queues are common in this direction), we were off to Silopi. Phew! The moral of the story: never leave your luggage unattended at the border.

If you want to know more about travelling in Kurdish Iraq, get a copy of Lonely Planet's *Middle East*, which has a chapter on Iraq.

A SUCCESS STORY

Ebru Baydemir is what you would call a 'local character'. Aged 33, she is the dynamic owner of Cercis Murat Konağı (below) in Mardin. A rare example of a female entrepreneur in eastern Anatolia, she has managed to foster a new mindset among many Mardin women. 'When I opened my restaurant in 2001, I wanted to offer jobs to women but this was difficult because of the prevailing women-should-stay-at-home mentality. I started with a few female cooks who knew tried-and-true recipes, but I was obliged to set up partition walls so that they could not be visible in the kitchen. Little by little, I gained the confidence of their husbands. At present 15 female employees work here and they don't have to conceal themselves any longer. In Mardin it's now accepted that women can work outside.' Any other achievement, Mrs Ebru? 'Cercis is the first licensed restaurant in southeastern Anatolia', something for which travellers will be eternally grateful.

Best of all, cooking courses are available for tourists. Check out www.cercismurat.com for more details.

range of amenities but there are no views of which to speak.

ourpick Erdoba Konakları (☎ 212 7677; www.erdoba.com.tr; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; s/d TL100/160; 🚻) Such serenity after the clamour of the main drag. Right in the heart of the old town, this boutique hotel – the first of its kind in Mardin – comprises four finely restored mansions, with lots of period charm. Rooms 101, 102, 201, 202, 203 and 402 all have vaulted ceilings and feel like cocoons. Feeling romantic? Room 301, with parquet flooring and a four-poster bed, will wow you. The downside: only five rooms come with a view (although a few terraces at the back look onto the Mesopotamia plain). There's a high-quality on-site restaurant.

Büyük Mardin Oteli (☎ 213 1047; www.buyukmardinoteli.com, in Turkish; Yeni Yol Caddesi; s/d TL110/140; 🚻 📺) The Büyük is an eyesore and shelters generic rooms, so don't say you weren't warned, but the views over old Mardin or the Mesopotamia plain (depending on the orientation of the room) are sensational – you'll be glued to the window (sadly, there's no balcony). It caters predominantly for groups and is often booked solid, so reservations are advised.

Eating & Drinking

İmzeil Et Lokantası (☎ 212 1062; Cumhuriyet Meydanı; mains TL5-9; 🕒 10am-7pm) This bright little spot on the main square is not breaking much new ground but it's popular for cheap hot lunches. And it's much less touristy than the Turistik Et Lokantası next door.

Turistik Et Lokantası (☎ 212 1647; Cumhuriyet Meydanı; mains TL6-12) The supercentral Turistik is firmly on the package-tour itinerary, and

yabancı are usually greeted with a 'Hello'. With its wide-ranging menu, the Turistik can plug the empty spaces in any stomach, but, judging by the *tavuk şiş*, the food is just OK, and the terrace overlooking the main square is charmless.

ourpick Cercis Murat Konağı (☎ 213 6841; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; mains TL10-18) There's certainly wow-factor in the setting and decor here: the Cercis occupies a traditional Syrian Christian home with two finely decorated rooms and a terrace affording simply stunning views. Treat yourself to a series of dainty dishes thoughtfully crafted by women from Mardin, with recipes from the days of yore and a creative twist (not a kebab in sight). There's a TV screen where you can watch them working their magic in the kitchen. *Mekbuss* (eggplant pickles with walnut), *kitel raha* (Syrian-style meatballs) and *dobo* (lamb with garlic, spices and black pepper) rank among the highlights. Service is exemplary and a well-considered wine list yields a varied selection of Turkish tipples. Don't miss it.

Other choices:

İlido (☎ 213 7288; Hükümet Konakü Arkası; pastries from TL2) This trendy hang-out has a mouth-watering array of pastries and ice creams. The *fıstıklı dondurma* (pistachio ice cream) is addictive (and we know what we're talking about). It's in the new town, but well worth the minibus ride.

Vitamin (Cumhuriyet Caddesi; juices from TL2; 🕒 8am-7pm) With its dramatic bright orange walls adorned with musical instruments, this pea-sized joint on the main drag has to be Mardin's kookiest spot. Freshly squeezed juices are served in glasses filled to the brim.

Çay Bahçesi (Cumhuriyet Caddesi) The perfect place to scribble a few postcards: 'The views over old Mardin and Mesopotamia are phenomenal...'

Getting There & Away

AIR

Mardin airport is 20km south of Mardin. There's no airport shuttle, but any minibus to Kızıltepe can drop you at the entrance (TL2).

Tur-al Tours (☎ 212 4141; Cumhuriyet Meydanı;

☎ 8am-7pm) Agent for Pegasus Airlines (www.izair.com.tr) and Turkish Airlines. Pegasus Airlines has two weekly flights to/from İzmir (from TL118).

Turkish Airlines (Bilem Turizm ve Seyahat Acentası;

☎ 213 3773; www.thy.com; Karayolları Karşısı Yenişehir; ☎ 8am-6pm) Next door to the Otel Bilen. One daily flight to/from İstanbul (from TL134).

BUS

Most buses leave from the İlçe Otogar east of the centre. For long-distance destinations, buses stop in front of the bus company offices in the old town and in new Mardin. From around 4pm services start to dry up so it's best to make an early start. Minibuses depart every hour or so for Diyarbakır (TL7, 1¼ hours), and for Midyat (TL6, 1¼ hours) and Nusaybin (the Syrian border; TL6, one hour). There are also five to six daily minibuses to Savur (TL5, one hour). Other useful regular services for travellers include to Urfa (TL15, three hours); to Cizre and Silopi (TL15, three hours), the major hub for northern Iraq (see boxed text, p635); to Şirnak (TL15, 3½ hours); and to Batman (TL8).

AROUND MARDİN

Deyrul Zafaran

The magnificent **Deyrul Zafaran** (monastery of Mar Hanania; admission TL3; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1-5pm) stands about 6km along a good but narrow road in the rocky hills east of Mardin. The monastery was once the seat of the Syrian Orthodox patriarchate and, although this has now moved to Damascus, the site continues to act as a local boarding school.

In AD 495 the first monastery was built on a site previously dedicated to the worship of the sun. Destroyed by the Persians in 607, it was rebuilt, only to be looted by Tamerlane six centuries later.

Shortly after you enter the walled enclosure via a portal bearing a Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic) inscription, one of the school kids will volunteer their services as a guide. First they'll show you the **original sanctuary**, an eerie underground chamber with a ceiling of huge, closely fitted stones held up as if by magic, without the aid of mortar. This room

was allegedly used by sun worshippers, who viewed their god rising through a window at the eastern end. A niche on the southern wall is said to have been for sacrifices.

The guide then leads you through a pair of 300-year-old doors to the **tombs** of the patriarchs and metropolitans who have served here.

In the chapel, the **patriarch's throne** to the left of the altar bears the names of all the patriarchs who have served the monastery since it was refounded in 792. To the right of the altar is the **throne of the metropolitan**. The present **stone altar** replaces a wooden one that burnt down about half a century ago. The walls are adorned with wonderful paintings and wall hangings. Services in Aramaic are held here.

In the next rooms you'll see **litters** used to transport the church dignitaries, and a **baptismal font**. In a small side room is a 300-year-old **wooden throne**. The floor **mosaic** is about 1500 years old.

A flight of stairs leads to very simple guest rooms for travellers and those coming for worship. The patriarch's small, simple bedroom and parlour are also up here.

There's no public transport here so you must take a taxi or walk. Hopeful drivers wait outside the bus company offices in Mardin and will ask TL25 to run you there and back and to wait while you look round.

Dara

About 30km southeast of Mardin, this magnificent ancient Roman city that has been forgotten in time will impress you. Dating back to the 6th century, Dara is the town where Mesopotamia's first dam and irrigation canals were built. You can see the ruins of the aqueducts and cisterns, as well as cave dwellings and rock-cut tombs.

Bar a couple of teahouses, there are no facilities in Dara. From Mardin, there are three daily services (TL3).

Savur

If you need an escape hatch, Savur is the one. This diamond of a town appears like a mirage in the countryside, just an hour's minibus ride (60km) from Mardin. Savur is a miniature Mardin, without the crowds. The atmosphere is wonderfully laid-back and the setting enchanting, with a weighty citadel surrounded by a honey-coloured crinoline of old houses, lots of greenery and a gushing river running

HIDDEN GEMS AROUND THE TÜR ABDİN PLATEAU

Culture vultures and independent travellers, provided you have your own wheels or you're OK with arranging a taxi for a day in Midyat (as there's no public transport), we've got something for you: the plateau of TÜR ABDİN, a traditional homeland of the Syrian Orthodox Church, just east of Midyat (towards Dargeçit). Dotted around the plateau is a smorgasbord of historic village churches and monasteries awaiting discovery. Some of them have been recently restored. A few not-to-be-missed places include **Mor Yakup**, near Barıştepe, **Mor İzozal**, perched on a knoll in Altıntaş, **Mor Kyriakos** in Bağlarbaşı, **Mor Dimet** in İzbarak, the thoughtfully restored **Meryemana** in Anitli, and **Mor Eliyo** in Alagöz (about 3km from Anitli), which was being restored when we dropped by.

All you need is a good road map. Roads are asphalted, villages are signposted and villagers will be happy to point you in the right direction. Here's the starting point of this trip: from Midyat, take the road to Hasankeyf (due north); after about 7km you'll reach the turn-off to Mor Yakup, on your right. *İyi yolculuklar* (have a good trip)!

in the valley. Go now, before this haven of serenity is let out of the bag, but promise you won't tell *too* many people!

With your own wheels, you can drive to **Dereciği**, also known as Killit, about 7km east of Savur. This Syrian Orthodox village has two restored churches and is famous for its wine.

SLEEPING & EATING

our pick **Hacı Abdullah Bey Konağı** (☎ 0535-275 2569, 0482-571 2127, 0533-239 7807; r per person half-board & without bathroom TL70) The moment you step through the door into this sturdy *konak* perched on the hilltop, you know you're in for something special. Could this be the *Thousand and One Nights* experience you thought you couldn't afford? The seven cocoonlike rooms are cosily outfitted with kilims, comfortable furnishings, brass beds, antiques and old fabrics. Bathrooms are shared, but that's a minor inconvenience when you factor in all the positives. Another pull is the friendly welcome of the Öztürk family. They don't speak much English, but they create a convivial atmosphere. Enjoy *yöresel yemeks* grandmama-style prepared from simple fresh ingredients. The rooftop terrace view will keep you intrigued for hours.

You'll find several simple *lokantas* (eateries serving ready-made food) in town, but for something special head to the **Uğur Alabalık Tesisleri & Perili Bahçe** (☎ 0482-571 2832; Gazi Mahallesi; mains TL5-9; ☎ 8am-9pm), which features a shady garden by the gushing river. Relish fresh trout, salads, potatoes or *içli köfte* and sluice it all down with a glass of *killit* (local wine) or rakı. So cool!

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Mardin there are about eight daily minibus services to Savur (TL5, one hour).

MİDYAT

☎ 0482 / pop 61,600

About 65km east of Mardin lies sprawling Midyat, with a drab new section, Estel, linked by 3km of potholed Hükümet Caddesi to the inviting old town. Midyat has lots of potential but is not as touristy as Mardin, mostly because it lacks Mardin's hillside setting. It's definitely worth a visit, nonetheless.

The centrepiece of the old part of town is merely a traffic roundabout. Close by, **honey-coloured houses** are tucked away behind a row of jewellery shops. Here, the alleyways are lined with houses whose demure doorways open onto huge courtyards surrounded by intricately carved walls, windows and recesses.

Like that of Mardin, Midyat's Christian population suffered in the early 20th century and during the last few decades, and much of the community has emigrated. There are nine Syrian Orthodox **churches** still in use in the town, though only four regularly hold services. Although you can see the steeples, it's hard to find the churches in the maze of streets so the best option is to accept one of the local guides, who are likely to be hot on your heels.

Midyat's range of accommodation is disappointingly slim. Most travellers (and the occasional tour group) bunk down at the **Hotel Demirdağ** (☎ 462 2000; www.hoteldemirdag.com, in Turkish; Mardin Caddesi; s/d TL35/60; 📶 📺 🚰), in new Midyat, where you don't have to pay a king's

ransom to enjoy the well-equipped rooms, colourful as a box of Smarties (but avoid rooms 107 and 109, which are windowless). Its location is handy – the otogar is just one block behind. **Saray Lokantası** (☎ 462 3436; Mardin Caddesi; mains TL6-8), on the same street, whips up good-value kebabs at criminally low prices.

Rattly minibuses regularly ply the bumpy route from outside the Saray Lokantası to old Midyat to save you the charmless walk. Midyat has two otogars, one in new Midyat (one block behind Hotel Demirdağ) and one in old Midyat, some 200m south of the roundabout along the road to Cizre. There are frequent services for Hasankeyf (TL5, 45 minutes), Batman (TL7, 1½ hours, 82km) and Mardin (TL6, 1¼ hours). Minibuses for Cizre (TL10, 1½ hours) and Silopi (for Iraq; TL12, two hours) leave from the otogar in old Midyat.

Minibuses from Mardin will pass through the new town, then drop you off at the roundabout in the old town. You could easily base yourself in Midyat and make a day trip to Mardin or Hasankeyf.

AROUND MIDYAT

Morgabriel

About 18km east of Midyat, **Morgabriel (Deyrul Umur) Monastery** (☎ 9-11.30am & 1-4.30pm) rises like a mirage from its desertlike surroundings. Though much restored, the monastery dates back to AD 397. St Gabriel, the namesake of the monastery, is buried here – the sand beside his tomb is said to cure illness. You'll see various frescoes and the immense ancient dome built by Theodora, wife of Byzantine emperor Justinian, and a more recent bell tower.

Morgabriel is home to the archbishop of Tür Abdin (Mountain of the Servants of God), the surrounding plateau. These days he presides over a much diminished flock of around 80 people, the majority students. Fortunately, life for the residents seems to be looking up after the recent troubles, and there should be no problem about visiting.

You could ask here about visiting some of the other churches in the region, such as the **Meryem Ana Kilisesi** at **Anittepe** (Hah).

To get to the monastery from Midyat take a minibus (TL4) heading along the Cizre road and ask to be dropped at the signposted road junction, from where it's a 2.5km walk uphill to the gate. Start early in the morning as minibuses become increasingly difficult to

find as the day wears on. If you don't feel like walking you can hire a taxi for about TL50 return, including waiting time.

Hasankeyf

☎ 0488 / pop 5500

Hasankeyf is a heartbreaker. This gorgeous honey-coloured village clinging to the rocks of a gorge above the Tigris River is a sort of Cappadocia in miniature and a definite must-see, but it's slated to vanish underwater (see boxed text, p640). Nobody knows exactly when this will happen because the Turkish authorities keep silence on the issue. Meanwhile, don't miss Hasankeyf, which has become a popular tourist destination.

SIGHTS

On the main road towards Batman, on the right-hand side of the road you'll see the conical **Zeynel Bey Türbesi**, isolated in a field near the river. This turquoise-tiled tomb was built in the mid-15th century for Zeynel, son of the Akkoyunlu governor, and it's a rare survivor from this period.

A modern bridge now spans the Tigris, but as you cross you'll see, to the right, the broken arches and pylons of the **Eski Köprüsü** (Old Bridge), their size giving some idea of the importance of Hasankeyf in the period immediately before the arrival of the Ottomans.

Across the bridge a sign to the right points to the **kale** and **mağaras** (caves). As you walk along the road you'll see the **El-Rizk Cami** (1409), sporting a beautiful, slender minaret similar to those in Mardin and topped with a stork's nest. Just past the mosque, the road forks. The right fork leads down to the banks of the river with a great wall of rock soaring up on the left. The left fork cuts through a rocky defile, the rock faces pitted with caves. Take the slippery stone steps leading up on the right to the **kale**.

You quickly come to the finely decorated main gate to the **kale** where you'll pay TL2. This strategic site has been occupied since Byzantine times, but most of the relics you see today were built during the reign of the 14th-century Ayyubids. Beyond the gate are caves, which youthful guides will describe as shops and houses. At the top of the rock you face the ruins of the 14th-century **Küçük Saray** (Small Palace), with pots built into the ceiling and walls for sound insulation and superb views over the river.

HASANKEYF UNDER THREAT

Hasankeyf is a gem of a place, but has the cloud of a giant engineering project hanging over it. Despite its beauty and history, the town is destined to vanish beneath the waters of the Ilisu Dam, part of the GAP project – see boxed text, p607. The proposed dam will flood a region from Batman to Midyat, drowning this historic site and several other archaeological treasures, and displacing over 37 villages. In 2002, several foreign investors pulled out amid the controversy provoked by the dam, but it seems that construction won't be delayed indefinitely, in spite of local resistance. The mayor of Hasankeyf has tried to gain international support to protect the sites, but the battle is virtually almost lost. With all this publicity, the town has become quite an attraction and draws hordes of Turkish tourists in summer. So join the visitors before it's too late.

You will then be led past a small **mosque**, which was obviously once a Byzantine church, to the **Büyük Saray** (Big Palace), with a creepy jail underneath, right by a tower teetering on the edge of the cliff. It was probably built as a watchtower. The 14th-century **Ulu Cami** was built on the site of a church.

SLEEPING & EATING

There is only one accommodation option in Hasankeyf. If it's full, you can base yourself in Batman, a charmless modern town about 37km to the north, which is well connected to Hasankeyf.

Hasankeyf Motel (☎ 381 2005; Dicle Sokak; s/d TL20/40) This modest 'motel' takes advantage of its spiffing location, right by the Tigris bridge. Keep your expectations in check, though. Rooms are no-frills, carpets are battered and bathrooms are shared (Turkish toilets). The only touch of fancy is the colourful bed linen. Aim for one of the rooms at the back, with a balcony that overlooks the river. Hot water and towels are available on request. No breakfast is served, but there are a few eateries nearby. It has only seven rooms, so it's not a bad idea to book ahead. The owner's sons speak good English.

Has Bahçe (☎ 381 2609; Dicle Sokak; mains TL5-10) This eatery occupies a shady garden and serves up fresh fish from the Tigris (look for the trouts in the pools) and meat dishes. It's down the road from the Hasankeyf Motel.

Few things could be more pleasurable than lunching where a series of **çardaks** (leafy-roofed shelters) have been set up along the riverbank. A normal meal of grilled meat or fish with salad and a cold drink is unlikely to come to more than TL8. There's also the **Volgeçen Hani** (☎ 381 2287; Dicle Kuyusu; mains TL5-10), which boasts a series of rock-hewn dining rooms overlooking the river. Sit on lumpy cushions,

hoe into a kebab or a grilled fish, knock it all down with a glass of rakı (yes, it's licensed!) and you should depart happy and buzzing.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Frequent minibuses run from Batman to Midyat, transiting Hasankeyf (TL3, 40 minutes, 37km). To Midyat, it costs TL5. There are also two daily services to Van (TL30, six hours), both at around 10.30am.

ŞIRNAK

Şirnak boasts a stunning location, with jagged mountains as a backdrop. There's not much to do, but it's a convenient staging post if you plan to reach Van on an alternative route. From there, you can take the long but highly scenic haul to Hakkari in the one daily minibus. The landscape is sublime, with a mix of canyons, passes, gorges and mountains; at times the road skirts the border with neighbouring Iraq. There's a high military presence in the area, but a passport control at a checkpoint is the worst you'll get.

There's one catch, though; the accommodation scene is pretty dismal. After a ruthless inspection of all hotels in town, we were left with only one acceptable option, the **Otel Murat** (☎ 0486-216 2857; Uludere Caddesi; s without bathroom TL15, d TL30; ☹), which fits the bill for a night's kip. Mattresses sink like hammocks and the shared bathrooms (for the singles) are a tad dank but it has air-con, clean sheets, wi-fi, and it's a wee walk from the minibus stop to Hakkari.

If your stomach is in knots, **Özlem Fırını Et Lokantası** (☎ 216 3492; Cumhuriyet Meydanı; mains TL4-8), on the main square, is a winner. It tosses up a competently cooked **tavuk şiş** accompanied with bulgur. There's no menu – just point at what you want. Pides are also available. Also worth considering is the **Diyarbakır Faysal**

Ustanin Evi (Cumhuriyet Caddesi; mains TL5-7), down the road to Otel Murat, and serving up a wicked *döner tavuk*, with just enough chilli to send your taste buds into a tailspin. The outdoor tables work a treat on a balmy evening. Right on the main square, the **Aile Çay Bahçesi** (Aile Tea Garden; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; ☀️ dawn-dusk) is a great place for plotting out your next itinerary ('Am I going to Cizre and on to Iraq or not?') while absorbing the magical mountain views.

From Şirnak onwards to the west, there is at least one daily minibus to Siirt (TL10, two hours, 96km), where you'll find connections to Bitlis and Tatvan, and five bus services to Diyarbakır (TL20, five hours, 340km). There are also frequent services to Cizre (TL4, one hour), from where you'll easily reach Silopi and the border with Iraq. There's a daily minibus to Hakkari (TL20, five to six hours depending on waits at checkpoints), leaving at about 9am from near Otel Murat, but at the time of writing foreigners were not allowed on board because of military activity in the area (for more details see p652). Şirnak is also connected to Mardin (TL15, three hours, four daily).

BITLIS

☎️ 0434 / pop 44,000

Bet you didn't know, but underrated Bitlis has one of the highest concentrations of historic buildings in eastern Anatolia, and thanks to a few EU-sponsored projects, has received a bit more attention over the last few years. For culture vultures, this is a great surprise, with a smorgasbord of monuments that testify to rich ancient origins. The contrast with neighbouring Tatvan is striking. While modern Tatvan boasts an orderly street plan, Bitlis is a somewhat chaotic old town squeezed into the narrow valley of a stream.

A **castle** dominates the town, and two ancient bridges span the stream. Make a beeline for the **Ulu Cami**, which was built in 1126, while the **Şerefiye Camii** dates from the 16th century. Other must-sees include the splendid **İhlasiye Medrese** (Quranic school), the most significant building in Bitlis, and the **Gökmeydan Camii**, which has a detached minaret.

The **İl Kültür Merkez** (Cumhuriyet Caddesi; ☑️ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) has good maps of the city and brochures covering the area. It's housed inside the İhlasiye Medrese.

Opened in 2008, the **Dideban Hotel** (☎️ 226 2820; Nur Caddesi; s/d TL30/50) features spruce rooms

and has an excellent on-site restaurant. It's conveniently located about 100m from the minibus stand for Tatvan and within easy reach of most monuments.

Regular minibuses travel from Tatvan to Bitlis (TL3, 30 minutes).

TATVAN

☎️ 0434 / pop 54,000

While Tatvan doesn't set the heart aflutter, it's ideally positioned if you plan a trip to spectacular Nemrut Dağı (Mt Nemrut, p642; not to be confused with the higher-profile Nemrut Dağı, p616, south of Malatya), Ahlat (p644) and Bitlis (left). Several kilometres long and just a few blocks wide, Tatvan is not much to look at, but its setting on the shores of Lake Van (backed by bare mountains streaked with snow) is magnificent. It is also the western port for Lake Van steamers.

Information

Everything you'll need (hotels, restaurants, banks, internet outlets, the PTT and the bus company offices) huddles together in the town centre.

Sleeping & Eating

Tatvan has a handful of hotels that are well used to housing tourists.

Hotel Üstün (☎️ 827 9014; Hal Caddesi; s/d TL25/40) Ignore the atrocious carpets and depressing couches in the reception – most rooms in the family-run Üstün have been spruced up and given a lick of fresh *boya* (paint) so they look clean and neat. Some rooms share toilets, but prices are the same – it's well worth getting in early and requesting room 205, 206, 207, 211 or 212, which come with private bathrooms.

Hotel Dilek (☎️ 827 1516; Yeni Çarşı; s/d TL35/60) The Dilek gets good marks for its spruce, colourful rooms with tiled bathrooms. Some have balconies. Singles are tiny – just enough room to scoot past a full-sized bed. Angle for room 201, 202, 301 or 302, which are more spacious and get more natural light. It's in a street running parallel to the main drag.

Tatvan Kardelen (☎️ 825 9500; Belediye Yanı; s/d TL50/80) This is usually where tour groups bunk down when in town, which is enough to recommend this high-rise in a quiet location next to the *belediye*. It sports spacious and well-equipped rooms, but the furnishings are dated and the neon-lit corridors as sexy as a hospital's.

Şimşek Lokantası (☎ 827 1513; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; mains TL5-10) This Tatvan stalwart on the main drag has all the usual kebaps as well as ready-made meals that will have you walking out belly-first. With its wood-panelled interior, it feels surprisingly cosy.

Kaşı Beyaz Izgara Salonu (☎ 827 6996; PTT Yanı; mains TL6-9) Locals flood here for supertasty kebaps, cooked to perfection on a big *ocak* (grill) on the ground floor. Choose your victim from the display case (will it be an Adana or a *yoğurtlu?*), then snap up a table upstairs. Excellent pide, too. On the same street as Hotel Dilek.

Eyvân Pide Lahmacun ve Melemen Salonu (☎ 827 6579; 1 Sokak; mains TL6-10) This discreet joint is heralded as the best place in town to enjoy a thin-crust pide or a *lahmacun*. After having vacuumed up a flavoursome *kaşarlı pide*, faultlessly cooked in the *fırın* (wood-fired oven) on the ground floor, we won't argue. It's one block behind the Şimşek Lokantası.

Getting There & Away

If you're heading to Van, you can take the ferry that crosses the lake twice a day (TL6 per person, about four hours). It doesn't have a fixed schedule, though. Buses to Van run round the southern shore of the lake (TL10, 2½ to three hours, 156km).

Minibuses to Ahlat (TL3, 30 minutes) leave every hour or so from PTT Caddesi, beside Türk Telekom and the PTT. The minibus stand for Bitlis (TL3, 30 minutes) is a bit further up the street. Direct minibuses to Adilcevaz are infrequent; you'll have to change in Ahlat.

AROUND TATVAN

Nemrut Dağı (Mt Nemrut)

This Nemrut Dağı (3050m) rising to the north of Tatvan is an inactive volcano with several crater lakes – not to be confused with the more famous Nemrut Dağı (Mt Nemrut, topped with the giant heads; see p16) near Kahta.

A trip up this Nemrut Dağı is also an unforgettable experience. Once you've reached the crater rim (13km from the main road), you'll be awed by the sensational views back over Lake Van and Tatvan, and forth over the water-filled craters. From the crater rim, you can **hike** to the summit, reached after 30 to 45 minutes – just follow the lip of the crater (the last stretch is a bit of a scramble). The scenery is almost completely unspoilt. In spring and early summer the lower slopes of the moun-

tain are a sea of sweet-smelling wildflowers. Midweek, the only company you're likely to have is the shepherds with their flocks (and dogs) and the hoopoes, nuthatches, skylarks and other birds. Once you've had your fill of vistas, follow the dirt road that leads down to the lake from the crater rim and find your own picnic area. Memorable!

You can visit Nemrut only from around mid-May to the end of October. At other times the summit is under metres of snow. **Skiing** is available in winter, on the outside slopes of Nemrut Dağı, and there's a state-of-the-art chairlift.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

It's not easy to get to Nemrut, as there are no regular services from Tatvan. In high season, you could try to hitch a ride. Your best bet is to ask the staff at your hotel in Tatvan for advice or hire a taxi. Expect to pay about TL100 return.

With your own transport, leave Tatvan by the road around the lake and then turn left towards Bitlis; about 300m further, turn right following a sign saying 'Nemrut 13km'. The road is rough but passable in an ordinary car except in wet weather. You'll reach the crater rim, from which a dirt road winds down into the crater and connects with other dirt roads that snake around the crater – this is your chance to make your own 'caldera tour' (fear not, you can't really get lost).

AROUND LAKE VAN (VAN GÖLÜ)

☎ 0432

Lake Van (Van Gölü) is eastern Anatolia's pièce de résistance. After the rigours of central Anatolia, this vast expanse of water surrounded by snowcapped mountains sounds deceptively like a holy grail for those in search of beaches and water sports. Lake Van has great potential for activities, but nothing has been really developed yet and infrastructure is lacking. Water sports? Lakeside resorts? Dream on! But at least this means it's scenic and virtually untouched. A circumnavigation around its shores reveals plenty of surprises.

By far the most conspicuous feature on the map of southeastern Turkey, this 3750-sq-km lake was formed when a volcano (Nemrut Dağı) north of Tatvan blocked its natural outflow.

South Shore

Travelling south around the lake between Van and Tatvan the scenery is beautiful, but

there's little reason to stop except at a point 5km west of Gevaş, where the 10th-century Church of the Holy Cross at Akdamar is a glorious must.

Sleeping & Eating

You can pitch your tent at the **Akdamar Camping ve Restaurant** (☎ 216 1505; camp sites per person TL2-5; mains TL10-12; ☞ Apr-Sep). It's basic – just a few patches of grass behind the restaurant, and no showers – but it's immediately opposite the ferry departure point for Akdamar island. The restaurant has a terrace with lake views and an indoor area in case of bad weather; the fish is fresh. Another speciality is the *kürt tavası* (meat, tomato and peppers cooked in a clay pot). It's licensed, but an Efes costs a whopping TL5.

Closer to Van, just east of Edremit, along the main road, you'll find a couple of midrange hotels by the water, including the bland but well-equipped **Merit Şahmaran** (☎ 214 3479; fax 612 2420; s/d TL80/120; ☑ ☒), 12km from Van.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses run the 44km from near Beş Yol in Van to Akdamar harbour for TL3 during high season. At other times, there's an hourly minibus to Gevaş (TL3). If you want to be dropped at the boat dock 5km further on, negotiate the price with the driver. Alternatively, catch a minibus heading to Tatvan and ask to be let off at Akdamar harbour. Make sure you're out on the highway flagging a bus back to Van by 4pm, as soon afterwards the traffic dries up and buses may be full.

Boats to the island run as and when traffic warrants it (minimum 10 people). Provided others are there to share the cost, a return ticket for the 20-minute voyage and admission to the island costs TL5. Getting to Çarpanak is harder. The boatmen are likely to want TL400 before they'll consider the 2½-hour voyage.

EDREMIT

About 15km west of Van you'll pass through Edremit, a small lakeside settlement with the feel of a seaside resort: all lilos, beach balls and ice cream.

GEVAŞ

Like Ahlat on the north shore, Gevaş has a cemetery full of tombstones dating from the 14th to 17th centuries. Notable is the polygonal **Halime Hatun Türbesi**, built in 1358 for a female member of the Karakoyunlu dynasty.

AKDAMAR

One of the marvels of Armenian architecture is the recently restored **Akdamar Kilisesi** (Church of the Holy Cross). It's perched on an island 3km out in the lake, and motorboats ferry sightseers back and forth.

In 921 Gagik Artzruni, King of Vaspurkan, built a palace, church and monastery on the island. Little remains of the palace and monastery, but the church walls are in superb condition and the wonderful relief carvings are among the masterworks of Armenian art. If you're familiar with biblical stories, you'll immediately recognise Adam and Eve, Jonah and the whale (with the head of a dog), David and Goliath, Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac, Daniel in the lions' den, Samson etc. There are some frescoes inside the church.

Akdamar island is also an ideal spot for a picnic.

North of Akdamar another even more isolated and forgotten 11th-century Armenian church stands on the island of **Çarpanak**, popular with birdwatchers.

ALTINSAÇ KILISESİ

Not surprisingly, the well-publicised, easily accessible Akdamar Kilisesi has overshadowed the southern shore's other highlights, and Altınsaç Kilisesi is no exception. Another relatively well-preserved Armenian church, it's perched on a mound overlooking the lake. This is a pearl of a site; if you have your own wheels, be sure to squeeze it into your itinerary. The word is not out, and you'll have the whole place to yourself.

From Akdamar, drive about 12km towards Tatvan until you reach a junction. Turn right onto the road marked for Altınsaç. After 3km the asphalt road ends and becomes a gravel road. The road skirts the shore of the lake for another 14km, until you reach the village of Altınsaç. On a clear day this is a wonderfully scenic drive, with breathtaking views over the shimmering waters of the lake and the undulating hills of the steppe. From the village it's another 2km to the church, which is visible from some distance – an awesome vision.

North Shore

If anything the journey around the north shore of Lake Van from Tatvan to Van, with first Nemrut Dağı (Mt Nemrut, opposite) and then Süphan Dağı (Mt Süphan, p644) looming

beside the road, is more beautiful than going around the south shore.

The major bus companies take the short-cut route around the south of the lake from Tatvan to Van. If you want to travel around the north shore you'll have to take a minibus to Ahlat from Tatvan, then hop on another minibus to Adilcevaz, where you'll have to break your journey. The next morning you'll take a bus to Van.

AHLAT

A further 42km along the lakeshore is the small town of Ahlat, famous for its splendid Seljuk Turkish tombs and graveyard. Don't overlook this largely underrated site, and allow at least one hour to visit the sights.

Founded during the reign of Caliph Omar (AD 581–644), Ahlat became a Seljuk stronghold in the 1060s. When the Seljuk sultan Alp Arslan rode out to meet the Byzantine emperor Romanus Diogenes in battle on the field of Manzikert, Ahlat was his base. Later, Ahlat had an extraordinarily eventful history even for Anatolia, with *emir* defeating prince and king driving out *emir*; hence, perhaps, the fame of its cemeteries.

Just west of Ahlat you'll see the overgrown polygonal 13th-century tomb, **Usta Şağirt Kümbeti** (Ulu Kümbeti), 300m off the highway and set in the midst of a field near some houses and a new mosque. It's the largest Seljuk tomb in the area.

A bit further along the highway on the left is a little museum, and behind it a vast unique **Selçuk Mezarlığı** (Seljuk cemetery), with stele-like headstones of lichen-covered grey or red volcanic tuff with intricate web patterns and bands of Kufic lettering. It's thought that Ahlat stonemasons were employed on other great stoneworking projects, such as the decoration of the great mosque at Divriği, near Sivas.

Over the centuries earthquakes, wind and water have set the stones at all angles, so they stand out like broken teeth – a striking sight with spectacular Nemrut Dağı as a backdrop. Most stones have a crow as sentinel, and tortoises cruise the ruins.

On the northeastern side of the graveyard is the beautiful and unusual **Bayındır Kümbeti ve Camii** (Bayındır Tomb & Mosque; 1477), with a colonnaded porch and its own *mihrab* (niche indicating the direction of Mecca).

The small **museum** (admission TL2; ☎ 8am–noon & 1–5pm) has a reasonable collection including

Urartian bronze belts and needles as well as some Byzantine glass-bead necklaces.

Other sites in Ahlat worth exploring if you have the time include the **Çifte Kümbet** (Twin Tombs), about 2km from the museum towards the town centre, and the **Ahlat Sahil Kalesi** (Ahlat Lakeside Fortress), south of the Çifte Kümbet, built during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent. The poplars here are knotted with crows' nests.

From Tatvan, minibuses leave for Ahlat (TL3, 30 minutes) from beside Türk Telekom and the PTT. Make sure you ask to be let off at the museum on the western outskirts of Ahlat, or you'll have to leg it back from the town centre. From Ahlat, there are regular minibuses to Adilcevaz (TL3, 20 minutes).

ADİLCEVAZ

About 25km east of Ahlat is the town of Adilcevaz, once a Urartian town but now dominated by a great Seljuk Turkish **fortress** (1571).

Snowmelt from the year-round snowfields on Süphan Dağı flows down to Adilcevaz, making its surroundings lush and fertile. As you enter the town along the shore, the highway passes the nice little **Ulu Camii**, built in the 13th century and still used for daily prayer.

From the centre of town, you can take a taxi to the **Kef Kalesi**, another Urartian citadel perched higher up in the valley (about TL20 return).

If you want to pause here, you can bunk down in the **Hotel Kent** (☎ 0434-311 3231; s/d without bathroom TL15/25), in the centre. The place is pervaded by a somewhat musty fug (those greyish carpets...) but the sheets are immaculate and the shared bathrooms (squat toilets) won't make you squirm.

From Adilcevaz, there are five direct buses to Van (TL10, 2½ hours), but the last one departs around 2pm – make sure you start out early in the day.

SÜPHAN DAĞI (MT SÜPHAN)

The Kilimanjaro-esque bulk that frames the horizon is **Süphan Dağı** (4053m), Turkey's second-highest mountain after Mt Ararat (Ağrı Dağı; p595). Though much less advertised than Mt Ararat, it offers excellent **hiking** options and is a good way to prep yourself for the more challenging climb to Mt Ararat. Contact one of the travel agencies in Doğubayazıt (see p593).

VAN

☎ 0432 / pop 391,000 / elevation 1727m

Frontier towns never looked so liberal. Young couples walking hand in hand on the main drag, students flirting in the pastry shops, live bands knocking out Kurdish tunes in pubs (nightlife, at last!), unscarved girls sampling an ice cream on a terrace and daring eye contact with foreigners... Van is different in spirit from the rest of southeastern Anatolia – more urban, more casual, less rigorous – but don't get too excited because you're not in Marmaris, darling.

Good news: Van boasts a brilliant location, near the eponymous lake. Bad news: forget about water sports and beaches – it's slim pickings in these departments. Instead, focus on the striking monuments, including Van Kalesi (Van Castle or the Rock of Van), spend a few days journeying around the lake, and explore the nearby historic sites of Çavuştepe, Hoşap and Yedi Kilise. But if all you need is to get away from it all, ditch your guidebook and take the daily minibus to the remote village of Bahçesaray and forget about everything.

History

The kingdom of Urartu, the biblical Ararat, flourished from the 13th to the 7th centuries BC. Its capital was on the outskirts of present-day Van. The Urartians borrowed much of their culture, including cuneiform writing, from the neighbouring Assyrians with whom they were more or less permanently at war. The powerful Assyrians never subdued the Urartians, but when several waves of Cimmerians, Scythians and Medes swept into Urartu and joined in the battle, the kingdom met its downfall.

Later the region was resettled by a people whom the Persians called Armenians. By the 6th century BC it was governed by Persian and Median satraps.

In the 8th century AD, Arab armies flooded through from the south, forcing the Armenian prince to take refuge on Akdamar island. Unable to fend off the Arabs, he agreed to pay tribute to the caliph. When the Arabs retreated, the Byzantines and Persians took their place, and overlordship of Armenia seasawed between them as one or the other gained military advantage.

After defeating the Byzantines in 1071 at Manzikert, north of Lake Van, the Seljuk Turks marched on, with a flood of Turkoman nomads in tow, to found the sultanate of Rum, based in

KURDISH WAY WITH WORDS

Southeastern Anatolia is predominantly Kurdish territory. Most Kurds speak Turkish, but in remote places you'll hear Kurmancî and Zazakî, the two Kurdish dialects spoken in Turkey. Surprisingly, those who speak Kurmancî won't understand those who speak Zazakî. Kurdish languages don't share any linguistic features with Turkish, but are related to Persian and other Indo-European languages. Instead of the ubiquitous *teşekkür ederim* ('thanks' in Turkish), you'll hear the much more straightforward *spas* in Kurmancî and instead of *merhaba* (hello), you'll hear *rojbas*.

Konya. The domination of eastern Anatolia by Turkish *emirs* followed and continued until the coming of the Ottomans in 1468.

During WWI, Armenian guerrilla bands intent on founding an independent Armenian state collaborated with the Russians to defeat the Ottoman armies in Turkey's east. From then on the Armenians, formerly loyal subjects of the sultan, were viewed by the Turks as traitors. Bitter fighting between Turkish and Kurdish forces on the one side and Armenian and Russian forces on the other brought devastation to the entire region and to Van. For more, see boxed text, p38.

The Ottomans destroyed the old city of Van (near Van Kalesi) before the Russians occupied it in 1915. Ottoman forces counterattacked but were unable to drive the invaders out, and Van remained under Russian occupation until the armistice of 1917. After the founding of the Turkish Republic, a new planned city of Van was built 4km east of the old site.

Orientation

Everything you'll need (such as hotels, restaurants, banks, internet cafés, the PTT and the bus company offices) lies on or around Cumhuriyet Caddesi, the main commercial street.

The city's otogar is on the northwestern outskirts, and most bus companies operate *servises* there from the town centre. The main train station is northwest of the centre near the otogar, with another station, İskele İstasyonu, several kilometres to the northwest on the lakeshore.

the site of the old city, destroyed during the upheavals of WWI. A few buildings have survived and are clearly visible from the top of the rock: the **Hüsrev Paşa Külliyesi**, dating back to 1567, which has been restored and has a *kümbet* (tomb) attached; the nearby **Kaya Çelebi Camii** (1662), with a similarly striped minaret; the brick minaret of the Seljuk **Ulu Cami**; and the **Kızıl Camii** (Red Mosque).

After soaking up the views, go down to the ticket office and ask the custodian (he'll expect a tip) to show you the huge cuneiform inscriptions (ask for the *tabela*) as well as the numerous *khachkars* (Armenian crosses) that are carved into the southern side of the rock. After skirting the western tip of the rock and crossing over a fence, you'll walk along the southern side of the rock, and you will be shown the most prominent features. You'll also walk past a water reservoir, an ancient hamam and a ruined palace (not visible from the top of the rock). The Kızıl Cami and the Ulu Cami can also easily be approached, further south. Taking some distance from the rock to get a wider perspective, the custodian will point out various rock-cut **funeral chambers** (not visible from the base of the rock), including that of King Argishti.

On the way back to the ticket office, ask the custodian to show you the **Sardur Burcu** (Sardur Tower; 840–830 BC), in the little willow forest (as there's no sign, it's not easy to find). It's a large black stone rectangle sporting cuneiform inscriptions in Assyrian praising the Urartian King Sardur I.

If you still have the stamina, get to the northeastern side of the rock, about 900m from the ticket office. There's a modern mosque and the **tomb** of Abdurrahman Gazi, a Muslim holy man. It's frequently visited by pilgrims including infertile women who are thought to be helped by coming here.

To get to Van Kalesi take a 'Kale' minibus from the minibus terminal that's just off Beş Yol (Ferit Melen Meydanı; TL1), which will drop you at the ticket office.

VAN MUSEUM

The small **Van Museum** (Van Müzesi; Kişla Caddesi; admission TL2; ☎ 8am–noon & 1–5pm Tue–Sun) boasts an outstanding collection of Urartian exhibits. The Urartian gold jewellery is the highlight, but the bronze belts, helmets, horse armour and terracotta figures are also well worth seeing.

The ethnographic exhibits upstairs include local Kurdish and Turkoman kilims and a carpeted sitting area, such as is found in village houses. The Genocide Section is a piece of one-sided propaganda displaying the contents of graves left from the massacres of Turks and Kurds by Armenians at Çavuşoğlu and Zeve.

The museum has a good bookshop with plenty of foreign-language titles about the region.

Sleeping

Van has a decent range of accommodation, though inspiration can be hard to find (please someone – open a boutique hotel!) and it's a wee bit more expensive than elsewhere in eastern Turkey. Most hotels are on or around the main drag, making comparisons relatively easy.

BUDGET

Otel Aslan (☎ 216 2469; Özal İdare İş Merkezi Karşısı; s TL15–20, d TL20–35) The great central location and budget rates keep this hotel-cum-hostel popular with travellers who have an eye on the bank balance. They've opted for tiled floors and bright colours here, and nobody's complaining. Rooms are shoebox-sized but light-filled and well maintained. Cheaper rooms share bathrooms – pray you're not the last in line to shower. No breakfast is served. Don't leave valuables in your room.

MIDRANGE

Büyük Asur Oteli (☎ 216 8792; asur_asur2008@hotmail.com; Cumhuriyet Caddesi, Turizm Sokakı; s/d TL45/75) Even if you're on a tight budget, consider spending a little more to enjoy the comforts of this reliable midrange venture. The Soviet-style facade is off-putting, but the rooms are more colourful and come complete with fresh linen, back-friendly beds, TV and well-scrubbed bathrooms. It's also noteworthy for its ultracentral location and its vast lobby where you can unwind over a beer. English is spoken and the hotel can organise tours to Akdamar island, Hoşap Castle and other local attractions.

Hotel Yakut (☎ 214 2832; fax 216 6351; PTT Caddesi; s/d TL45/80) The interior and exterior looks of the Yakut aren't going to inflame the passions of many architects or interior designers, but the renovated rooms, laminated floors, pristine (yet pokey) bathrooms and attentive service make this one of the more solid midrange options in the centre.

Ada Palas (☎ 216 2716; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; s/d TL50/80) The 2nd floor is *yeşil* (green), the 3rd floor canary yellow and the 4th floor electric *mavi* (blue). The rooftop breakfast room is awash with pastel hues. The owners of the recent Ada Palas certainly like to add colour to life. It's well organised and bank-manager-friendly, and its very central location is a gem, with all the restaurants and pastry shops within easy reach.

Otel Akdamar (☎ 214 9923; www.otelakdamar.com; Kazım Karabekir Caddesi; s/d TL60/90) The Akdamar has long been a key player in Van's accommodation scene. These days, it's looking rather worn, like a grand old dame past her prime but not yet ready to retire from public appearances. The location is excellent, it's well organised and amenities are solid, but this place needs to move with the times if it's not to be left resting on its former glories.

Büyük Urartu Oteli (☎ 212 0660; www.buyukurartuotel.com; Hastane 2 Caddesi; s/d TL70/100; 🚗 🚗) This reassuring choice gives off a serious hotel vibe, with professional staff and an impressive lobby. The motel-like rooms are nothing to write home about but the full array of amenities, including a sauna, a pool and rooftop restaurant, offers ample compensation. The Urartu's primary clientele are business travellers and tour groups.

Hotel Tamara (☎ 214 3295; Yüzbaşıoğlu Sokak; s/d TL100/140) For classic comfort and convenient location, this solid, wedge-shaped option is a real steal, although its executive look doesn't really scream vacation. Highlights include cosy rooms with the requisite mod cons, a hamam, unflappable staff and the impressive hotel restaurant's *mangals*. It caters mainly for businesspeople.

Eating

Safa 3, Çorba 1 Paça Salonu (☎ 215 8121; Kazım Karabekir Caddesi; soups TL2; 🕒 24hr) If you're a gastronomic adventurer, head to this quirky little restaurant. Regulars swear by the *kelle* (mutton's head), and we're more than happy for them to be the judge! The lentil soup, though a bit spicy for the uninitiated, takes you into more traditional culinary territory.

Ayaç Pastaneleri (☎ 216 0081; Kazım Karabekir Caddesi; snacks TL2-4) With its see-and-be-seen glass front on the 1st floor and modern furnishings, this place lures in students in search of a pleasant spot to flirt and relax over toothsome baklavas and decent snacks. Nab a table

out front, allowing premium views of the people parade filing past. So cute.

Funda (☎ 216 7498; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; mains TL2-6) This elegant café has been spoiling customers and waistlines for several years with its irresistible cakes, ice creams and pastries. It's on the main thoroughfare.

Akdeniz Tantuni (☎ 216 9010; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; sandwiches TL3) This delightful little den on the main drag features colourful surrounds and low tables. It prepares devilish chicken sandwiches at paupers' prices.

Saçı Beyaz Et Lokantası (☎ 214 4016; Kazım Karabekir Caddesi; mains TL4-13) With an appetising selection of pastries and other delicacies, carb lovers should make this pastry shop their first port of call. The vast, vivacious terrace is usually packed to bursting with Van's movers and shakers in the late afternoon. Snacks, pasta and grills available at the restaurant section upstairs will quell greater hunger pangs.

Kebabistan (☎ 214 2273; Sinemalar Sokak; mains TL5-10) You're within safe boundaries here: the kitchen turns out expertly cooked kebabs (go for the *kuşbaşı*, with little morsels of beef). One grumble: no side salad is served with your meat dish. Its second branch, across the street, specialises in pide. Getting there is half the fun: it's in a side street where men can be seen sitting on low chairs, playing backgammon and drinking tea.

Halil İbrahim Sofrası (☎ 210 0070; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; mains TL6-12) One word describes this downtown hot spot: yum. The eclectic food is well presented and of high quality, with service to match, and served in sleek surrounds. Ah, the İskender kebab...so rich, so tender. Pide aficionados will go for the generous 'pide special', with a bit of everything – it melts in the mouth. If only alcohol was available...

Tamara Ocakbaşı (☎ 214 3295; Yüzbaşıoğlu Sokak; mains TL6-13) A meal here is dizzying, especially for carnivores. In the Hotel Tamara, the dining room eatery features 40 *ocak* – each table has its own grill. Mood lighting adds a touch of atmosphere in the evening, something that's in short supply in this part of Turkey! High-quality meat and fish dishes feature prominently, but the list of meze is equally impressive.

Other temptations in the centre:
Çavuşoğlu (☎ 214 2669; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; pastries from TL2) Luscious ice creams and dangerously good baklavas.

YUMMY BREAKFASTS

Van is famed for its tasty *kahvaltı* (breakfast). Skip the usually bland breakfast that is served in your hotel and head straight to Eski Sümerbank Sokak, also called 'Kahvaltı Sokak' (Breakfast St), a pedestrianised side street running parallel to Cumhuriyet Caddesi. Here you'll find a row of eateries specialising in complete Turkish breakfasts, including the buzzing **Sütçü Fevzi** (☎ 216 6618; Eski Sümerbank Sokak; ☺ 7am-noon) and **Sütçü Kenan** (☎ 216 8499; Eski Sümerbank Sokak; ☺ 7am-noon), which have tables set up outside. The other restaurants on the street are equally good. On summer mornings the street literally heaves with punters sampling *otlu peynir* (cheese mixed with a tangy herb, Van's speciality), *beyaz peynir* (a mild yellow cheese), honey from the highlands (mmm!), olives, *kaymak* (clotted cream), butter, tomatoes, cucumbers, and *sucuklu yumurta* (omelette with sausage). Whet your appetite by checking out the pictures on www.vandakahvalti.com (in Turkish). A full breakfast will set you back around TL8. A typical Van experience.

Güven (☎ 214 0300; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; pastries from TL2) Van's prime pastry peddler will leave you a drooling mess.

Simit Sarayı (Cumhuriyet Caddesi; simits TL1.50; ☺ 8am-8pm) If you can't find this bustling *simit* shop on the main drag you've lost either your eyesight or your sense of smell.

Drinking & Entertainment

While Van can't be mistaken for Ibiza, there are a couple of lively hang-outs that can be recommended. They are resoundingly popular among students of both sexes and make for a great evening out.

Barabar Türk Evi (☎ 214 9866; Sanat Sokak) The closest thing Van has to a pub, the Barabar is a definite rare breed in eastern Turkey. It may be lodged on the 1st floor of an unprepossessing building, but there is a fever-pitch energy with its mainly student crowd of both sexes gulping down pints of frothy draught beer (about TL5). It gets frantic here at weekends, with a live band knocking out Kurdish tunes.

Halay Türkü Bar (☎ 214 8233; Kazım Karabekir Caddesi) Almost a carbon copy of the Barabar, the Halay also features *canlı müzik* (live bands). Although it's trying hard and is a great place, the Halay lacks the charisma of the Barabar.

Getting There & Away

AIR

A taxi to the airport costs about TL20.

Pegasus Airlines (www.flypgs.com) Has six weekly flights to/from Ankara (from TL108).

Sun Express (www.sunexpress.com.tr) Has six weekly flights to/from İzmir (from TL148, two hours) and three weekly flights to/from Antalya (from TL148, 1¼ hours).

Turkish Airlines (www.thy.com) Has one to two daily flights to/from İstanbul (from TL128) and one daily flight to/from Ankara (from TL128).

Urartu Turizm (☎ 214 2020; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; ☺ 8am-8pm) An agent for Pegasus, Sun Express and Turkish Airlines.

BOAT

A ferry crosses Lake Van between Tatvan and Van twice daily. There's no fixed schedule. The trip costs TL6 per passenger and takes about four hours. 'İskele' dolmuşes ply İskele Caddesi to the harbour (TL1).

BUS

Many bus companies have ticket offices at the intersection of Cumhuriyet and Kazım Karabekir Caddesi. They provide *servises* to shuttle passengers to and from the otogar.

Minibuses to Doğubayazıt leave from a small bus stand off İskele Caddesi, a few blocks west of Beş Yol. Minibuses to Bahçesaray (TL15, three hours, one morning service) leave from near a teahouse called Bahçesaray Çay Evi, south of the bazaar. For Hoşap and Çavuştepe (TL5, 45 minutes), you can take a minibus that leaves from the Yüksekova Garajı or the Başkale Garajı, both on Cumhuriyet Caddesi, a few hundred metres south of the Büyük Asur Otel. Minibuses to Gevaş and Akdamar (TL3, about 45 minutes) depart from a small bus stand in a side street off Zübeydehanım Caddesi, near the Otel Aslan. For Hoşap, Çavuştepe and Akdamar, there are regular services and you shouldn't wait more than a hour.

To get to Iran, there are direct buses to Orumiyeh (in Iran).

Details of some services are listed in the table, p650.

CAR

Consider renting a car to journey around Lake Van. **Avis – Urartu Turizm** (☎ 214 2020; Cumhuriyet

SERVICES FROM VAN'S OTOGAR

Destination	Fare (TL)	Duration (hr)	Distance (km)	Frequency (per day)
Ağrı	20	3	213	frequent buses
Ankara	40	22	1250	frequent buses
Diyarbakır	25	7	410	frequent buses
Doğubayazıt (via Çaldıran)	10	3	185	several morning minibuses
Erciş	5	1¼	95	several buses
Erzurum	25	6	410	several buses
Hakkari	15	4	205	a few buses
Malatya	35	9-10	500	frequent buses
Orumiyeh (Iran)	20	6	311	2
Şanlıurfa	30	9	585	a few buses
Tatvan	10	2½	156	frequent buses
Trabzon	40	12	733	a few direct buses, most via Erzurum

Caddesi), next door to Büyük Asur Oteli, rents cars for about TL90 per day.

TRAIN

The twice-weekly *Vangözü Ekspresi* from İstanbul and Ankara terminates at Tatvan; from Tatvan, the ferry will bring you to the dock at Van. The weekly *Trans Asya Ekspresi* connects İstanbul to Tehran and stops at Van. It leaves for Tehran (TL45) on Tuesday and Friday any time between 9pm and midnight; for İstanbul (TL60), it also leaves on Tuesday and Friday. Confirm exact times at the train station.

You can get to the station İstasyon by minibus from near Beş Yol (TL1).

Getting Around

For minibuses to Van Kalesi and the *iskele* (ferry dock), go to the minibus terminal near Beş Yol at the northern end of Cumhuriyet Caddesi.

AROUND VAN
Yedi Kilise

The poignant, crumbling Yedi Kilise (Seven Churches) is about 9km southeast of Van, in a typical Kurdish village. It used to be a large monastery. The arched portal sports elaborate stone carvings, and you can also see various Armenian inscriptions above it. Inside, there are some well-preserved frescoes. There's no admission fee but a small donation is expected. If you want to buy souvenirs, women selling knitted gloves and socks usually wait near the building and will be happy to show their handicrafts. After visiting the church,

you can mosey around the muddy streets of the village.

There's no reliable public transport to Yedi Kilise. The most practical way to get there is by taxi (about TL30 including waiting time), or you could walk back to Van and enjoy the scenery.

Bahçesaray

From Van, the 110km ride to reach this town in the middle of nowhere, set deep in the mountains, is exhilarating – be prepared to run out of superlatives. Bahçesaray's main claim to fame is its isolation: because of the snow it's cut off from the outside world at least six months of the year. 'Half the year we belong to God,' say the locals. From Van, the highly scenic road crosses the steppe before gradually ascending to the Karabel Geçiti, at 2985m dizzying. On your way look for *zoma* (encampments), with Kurdish shepherds, their flocks and their damn dogs (beware!). The scenery is captivating on a clear day – the air is intoxicatingly crisp and the surrounding mountains make a perfect backdrop.

Bahçesaray is a place to get away from it all, but there are also a few nearby monuments that are worth a visit, including a couple of Armenian churches and an ancient bridge. You could also play chess with the locals, who are reputedly the best players in eastern Anatolia. Those with a sweet tooth won't leave without sampling the delicious local *bal* (honey).

Bahçesaray has a little **guesthouse** (per person TL10) that overlooks the river. Standards are modest but you're not really here to pamper yourself, right?

In summer, you could reach Bahçesaray with a normal vehicle, but you should know that the road is tarred only up to Yukarı Narlıca and deteriorates markedly near the pass – a 4WD or a high-clearance vehicle would be more appropriate. If it's wet, this part of the road is impassable with a normal vehicle. Take note also that this ride is not for the faint-hearted; expect lots of twists and turns, steep gradients and precipitous ravines. There is sometimes a *jandarma* (police) checkpoint at Yukarı Narlıca.

One or two minibuses leave daily except Sunday from a small minibus stand in Van (ask for Bahçesaray Çay Evi, off Zübeydehanım Caddesi). The bumpy ride takes about three hours and costs TL15.

Hoşap & Çavuştepe

A day excursion southeast of Van along the road to Başkale and Hakkari takes you to the Urartian site at Çavuştepe (25km from Van) and the spectacular Kurdish castle at Hoşap (Güzelsu; 33km further along). Both sites amply reward the effort of visiting them.

Hoşap Castle (admission TL2) perches photogenically on top of a rocky outcrop alongside Güzelsu, a hicksville truck-stop village. Cross one of the two bridges (the one with alternate dark and light stones dates from the 17th century) and follow the signs around the far side of the hill to reach the castle entrance, above which are superb lion reliefs. You might not be allowed to enter the fortress because some parts are crumbling. Looking east from the castle you can see a row of mud defensive walls that once encircled the village.

Built in 1643 by a local Kurdish chieftain, Mahmudi Süleyman, the castle has a very impressive entrance gateway in a round tower. The guardian will quickly spot you and rush to sell you a ticket.

The narrow hill on the left side of the highway at Çavuştepe was once crowned by the fortress-palace **Sarduri-Hinili** (admission TL2), home of the kings of Urartu and built between 764 and 735 BC by King Sardur II, son of Argishti. These are the best-preserved foundations of any Urartian palace.

From the car park, the **yukarı kale** (upper fortress) is up to the left, and the vast **aşağı kale** (lower fortress) to the right. At the upper fortress there is little to see except a platform, possibly used for religious rites, and the ruins of a temple to Haldi, the national god of the

ancient kingdom of Urartu, but from here you can see the layout of the lower fortress.

Climb the rocky hill to the lower fortress temple ruins (Mabet), marked by a gate of black basalt blocks polished to a high gloss; a few locks on the left side are inscribed in cuneiform. As you walk around, notice other illustrations of Urartian engineering ingenuity: the cisterns under the pathways, the storage vessels, the kitchen and the palace. Down on the plains to the south you'll see canals also created by the Urartians.

To get to the Hoşap and Çavuştepe sites, catch a minibus (on Cumhuriyet Caddesi in Van) heading to Başkale or Yüksekova and say you want to get out at Hoşap (TL5). After seeing the castle, flag down a bus back to Çavuştepe, 500m off the highway, and then catch a third bus back to Van. It's pretty easy to do this trip on your own as frequent minibuses and buses ply the route.

HAKKARI

☎ 0438 / pop 236,000 / elevation 1720m

Hakkari has one problem: it's a bit too close to the Qandil mountains in Iraq, where PKK rebels are supposed to be based. In other words, the Turkish army is seriously active in the area and, at the time of writing, Hakkari was the only city in southeastern Anatolia that was a bit tricky to access for foreigners. We tried to get to Hakkari from Şırnak, but we weren't allowed on the daily minibus that plies the route between the two cities. The only option is to take a bus from Van, and go back to Van the same way.

Hakkari is ragged around the edges, as befits a city that was at the epicentre of the Kurdish rebellion during the 1980s and '90s and that is tucked away in Turkey's far southeastern corner, at 1700m, far from any other major urban centre. The ongoing conflict with the PKK in the area reinforces this impression. It's not all that grim, though. The setting is truly sensational. The city is ringed by the jagged **Gilo Dağı** mountains, which have fabulous trekking potential. No doubt Hakkari will be back on the trekking map when the situation improves.

Dangers & Annoyances

Women travellers should expect to be the main focus of attention. The area is overwhelmingly male-oriented, and female travellers can be made to feel unwelcome. It's wise to dress modestly.

VISITING TURKEY'S DEEP SOUTHEAST

The southeastern corner of Turkey (east of Siirt and Midyat) still carries a fearsome reputation among travellers and among Turks from western Anatolia (who usually know nothing about the area). The southeast was at the epicentre of the Kurdish rebellion during the 1980s and '90s and for a long time was off limits to travellers. At the time of writing, there was military activity against the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK/Kongra-Gel) rebels in the mountains along the border between Turkey and Iraq. Truth is, very few areas are off limits to travellers. The whole area is under heavy military control and there are checkpoints, but no hassles to speak of – just have your passport on hand and don't deviate from the main road.

It might be a bit intimidating for first-timers, especially women travellers, but you shouldn't believe all the scare stories. While a few pockets of the region remain problematic, the vast majority of people are as warm and welcoming to visitors as anywhere in Turkey. At the time of research, we were able to travel without problem (and using public transport) as far as Şırnak, Siirt, Cizre and Silopi, as well as Hakkari (from Van; see p651). The only road that was closed to foreigners was the long stretch from Şırnak to Hakkari, and it's easy to understand why – the road goes along the border with Iraq.

The only thing you need to do is to be more vigilant and seek local advice before setting off. Anyway, the military will simply not allow you to get too close to trouble – if any. Whatever the situation, you'll probably be the only travellers for miles around.

Check the situation out. If it looks OK, jump right in. You won't regret it.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Şenler (☎ 211 5512; Bulvar Caddesi; s/d TL60/90) Hakkari's best-value and most reassuring hotel, by far. Staff are professional and eager to help (ask for Turan Şimşek), bathrooms are kept in top nick and you won't be tripping over your backpack in the generous-sized rooms. It's also very central.

Hacıbaba Kebap Salonu (☎ 211 3003; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; mains TL4-9) One of the best restaurants in town. As well as the usual kebaps, the Hacıbaba turns out satisfying *tavuk şiş* served with salad and fresh bread. The big grill at the back is impressive. It's just off the main square.

Getting There & Away

From Van to Hakkari, there are regular bus services (TL15, four hours). There are also several daily minibuses to Yüksekova

(TL7, 78km), from where you can cross the border at Esendere-Sero and journey on to Iran. Westwards you can take the long but highly scenic haul to Şırnak in the one daily minibus (TL20, five to six hours depending on waits at checkpoints) but, at the time of research, foreigners were not allowed on this road because of military activity in the nearby mountains.

NORTH OF VAN

If you're bound for Doğubayazıt from Van, the most direct way is to take one of the minibuses that travel via Muradiye, Çaldıran and Ortadirek. This 185km run is worth taking for the magnificent pastoral scenery along the way, especially if you can pause at the spectacular **Muradiye Waterfalls**. Keep your passport handy for any army checkpoints you may encounter.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above – 'Do the right thing with our content.'