

# AN IN QUEST OF THE CLASSICS' SPECIAL SEVEN CHURCHES TOUR



Duration: 8 Nights / 9 Days (1 Night Optional Patmos Extension)

## Tour itinerary:

Istanbul / Izmir / Pamukkale / Kuşadası

## DAY 01

## Arrival in Istanbul

Arrive at Ataturk International Airport in Istanbul. Meet your guide and transfer to the hotel. Upon arrival, enjoy a welcome briefing and orientation walking tour of the hotel area. The remainder of the day is at leisure.

Overnight: at Divan Hotel in Istanbul

## DAY 02

## Istanbul

After breakfast at our hotel, we begin a full day city tour including lunch and visits to the ancient Hippodrome, Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, and Topkapi Palace.

**Hippodrome:** The ancient Hippodrome is an enormous public entertainment arena that once seated as many as 100.000 zealous fans witnessing chariot races, executions, and mock battles. Once the centre of Byzantine civic life, it is still decorated by the Egyptian Obelisk, the Bronze Serpentine Column, and the Column of Constantine.

**Blue Mosque:** Built between 1609 and 1616, the Sultan Ahmet Mosque is more familiarly known as the Blue Mosque because its interior gleams with magnificent panels of blue and white 17th Century Iznik tiles. Located near Topkapi Palace, it was considered the Supreme Imperial Mosque during Ottoman Istanbul.



**Hagia Sophia:** This famous basilica was constructed in the 6th century A.D. It is often described as the greatest work of Byzantine architecture. Once the Church of Holy Wisdom, Christendom's crowning glory, and now a museum, it glittered with mosaics, and art treasures filled every corner. Today, Haiga Sophia is the forth largest building made as a church in the world. It was dedicated to the Hagia Sophia which means the Divine Wisdom, an attribute of Christ.

**Topkapi Palace Museum:** Topkapi was the second palace built in Istanbul after the conquest. It was a residence for the Ottoman Sultans and includes a maze of opulent buildings which were at the centre of the Ottoman Empire between the 15th and 19th centuries. This palace, where the sultans and their courts and harem lived and governed, is now one of the world's richest museums. During our tour we will have lunch at Konyali restaurant, located within the Topkapi Palace Complex and serving traditional meals of Ottoman cuisine. In the late afternoon, return to the hotel for time at leisure.



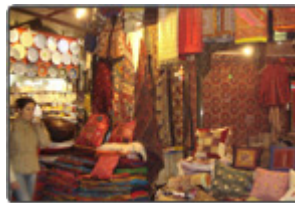
Overnight: at Divan Hotel in Istanbul  
Included meals: B



After breakfast at the hotel, depart for a full-day sightseeing tour. Our first visit is to the **Basilica Cistern** or **Underground Palace**. Istanbul was one of the most often besieged cities in the world and has always needed permanent water supplies. As a result, many underground cisterns were built during the Byzantine Empire. Water was brought to these big reservoirs from far away sources through aqueducts. The largest and most ornate of these cisterns is the Underground Palace. In its construction, columns and capitals of earlier temples were used and this provides a very decorative appearance.

After this visit we will continue to **St. Saviour in Chora Church**. This church museum originally formed the centre of a Byzantine monastery complex. Only the church section, which was dedicated to Jesus Christ the Saviour, has survived. The three most important features of the church, which have been restored by Theodorus Metochitus in the 14th Century, are mosaics, frescoes and the funerary chapel (Paraclesion).

Next we will proceed to lunch (on own) at a sea-front restaurant, after which we will transfer to the pier to start our one and a half hour Bosphorus cruise. The **Bosphorus** is a narrow, navigable strait between Europe and Asia connecting the Black Sea to the Marmora Sea. It is about 20 miles long and varies between 0.5 and 1.5 miles in width. Along both shores are many attractions including ancient ruins, picturesque villages, wooden houses and forested areas.



After the cruise we will continue our tour with a visit to the **Grand Bazaar**. The area of the Grand Bazaar was a trade center during the Byzantine period. Two bedestens (domed masonry structures) were built by Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror to enrich the economic life in the city. Later on as people needed more places for trade, they added other buildings outside these structures. Today, the atmosphere of the Grand Bazaar is very interesting and has consequently become a very popular place for visitors to explore a labyrinth of streets and passages housing eighteen entrances and more than 4.000 shops.

Here our tour ends, but those who do not wish to return to the hotel may stay to explore the near-by exotic **Spice Bazaar** on their own. Your evening is at leisure.

Overnight: at Divan Hotel in Istanbul

Included meals: B

#### DAY 04

Istanbul / Izmir



In the morning we transfer to Istanbul airport for the 1-hour flight to Izmir. Upon arrival we'll have a panoramic tour of **Izmir (Smyrna)** and visit the ancient Agora. During Roman times, Smyrna became a rival city to Ephesus. It prided itself as being the Rome's most faithful ally, and built a temple for the Goddess Rome as early as the 2nd century BC and later for Emperor Tiberius. The Christian faith in Izmir began with the activities of St. Paul who sent some of his disciples there.

According to ancient sources, the earliest bishop of Smyrna was Apelles. The city hosted a great Jewish colony and some of these Jews accepted Christian faith at an early stage. However, the church in Smyrna had a great struggle against tremendous political and religious opposition and experienced poverty and tribulations. It is claimed that St. John returned to Izmir from Patmos after his exile. The letter addressed to the church in Izmir is full of sympathy and love. It was written to the church nearly 60 years before the martyrdom of St. Polycarp. Because of its magnificent location, the city was captured by various nations through its history. After our tour the guide will advise local restaurant for a lunch break. Check in at the hotel, have time at leisure, and an included dinner.

Overnight: at Fuar Anemon in Izmir

Included meals: B, D

#### DAY 05

Izmir / Pergamum / Thyatira / Izmir

In the morning after breakfast we drive to the ancient site of **Pergamum** and visit the Acropolis and Asclepion. During the time of St. John's letters, the city of Pergamum was one of the most important cities of the first century with its Zeus, Dionysus, Athena and Imperial Cult temples. Especially the cults of the Emperor Augustus and Goddess Roma were very strong, and the city was full of statues of the emperor and Roman divinities. So a fight between the Imperial cults and young Christian church was inevitable.



According to ancient sources, Gaius was the first bishop of Pergamum. He was followed by the dentist Antipas. The letter, written to the church in Pergamum, is both full of praise and accusations. The people of Pergamum were accused of eating the food offered to pagan gods and the practice of immortality. After lunch on our own at local restaurant in Pergamum, we will visit ancient site of **Thyatira**. Although Thyatira was the smallest and least important of the seven cities, a letter written to the church in Thyatira was the longest of the seven letters.

It was also the hometown of Lydia, a rich and notable merchant, who became St. Paul's first convert on the European Soil in Philippi. Evidently she had moved from her town Thyatira to Philippi for business. It is not known whether Lydia returned to Thyatira to spread the Christian faith and by the time the

Revelation was written, Thyatira had a prosperous church. The letter speaks about the Thyatiran church with warmest commendations: "I know your deeds, your love, your faith and your perseverance." After visiting Thyatira, return to the hotel in the late afternoon for an evening at leisure and dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: at Fuar Anemon in Izmir

Included meals: B, D

**DAY 06****Izmir / Sardis / Philadelphia / Pamukkale (Hierapolis)**

Transfer by motor coach to Pamukkale. Sightseeing en route, including visits to the temple of Artemis, then the ancient sites of Sardis and Philadelphia.

**Sardis** was the capital city of King Croesus who was considered the richest man on earth in the ancient times. Due to a gold bearing river Pactalus and gold collected in the area, the Lydian Kingdom became one of the great Kingdoms of the antiquity.



Lydians who minted the first coins with a fixed, guaranteed value were so proud of their richness and their impregnable fortress, they were sure that no army on earth could capture their city.

But the city was captured twice when Lydian guards were careless and sleeping. After each disaster, the city recovered but slipped back into a false sense of security.



Then we will continue to the ancient site of **Philadelphia**. Attalos II, the king of Pergamum, established the city by the Alasehir River for his brother Eumenes and named it Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. His aim was to spread the Greek Culture and language towards the east. So Philadelphia was a city on a mission. There is no mention of the first establishment of the Philadelphian Church. Like Smyrna's church, Philadelphia stands out because of its faithfulness.

The city was located on the eastern edge of the Ionian civilization, and it had the most difficult task of spreading Christian faith to the east, outside the Ionian region. Philadelphia, together with Smyrna was considered as one of the distinguished churches out of the seven churches of Revelation about which nothing bad was mentioned by St. John.

Lunch in a local village, and then continue to Pamukkale. Before arriving to the hotel, visit the ancient site of **Hierapolis**. Ancient Hierapolis appears to have been founded by King Eumenes II of Pergamum and its name is derived from Hiera, the wife of King Telephos, the legendary founder of Pergamum. The first structure one encounters on reaching the plateau is the city baths, which are in a very good state of preservation.



The baths are Roman and from the 2nd century A.D. The city theater was originally located above the northern gate, but when the city was rebuilt during the reign of the Flavian emperors (60 A.D.) the theater was relocated, and the seats from the old structure were used in the work. During the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211 A.D.) the theater was modified and richly decorated with relief. In 532 it was discovered that the theater had been weakened by age and the almost daily seismic activity that takes place here and had to be reinforced. Since the theater has been restored, it is now possible to see the friezes of mythological scenes depicting Apollo and Artemis in their original positions. After our tour, check in and have dinner at our hotel in Pamukkale.

Overnight: at Colossae Hotel in Pamukkale

Included meals: B, D

**DAY 07****Pamukkale / Laodicea / Aphrodisias / Kusadasi**

After breakfast at the hotel, leave Pamukkale and visit the ancient sites of Laodicea and Aphrodisias on the way to Kusadasi. **Laodicea** is the most southerly of the seven churches. Although it is not known when the seeds of the new church were sown there or when the church took its roots there, the letter addressing the church in Laodicea is the sternest of the seven letters, containing much reprimand but no praise. Although there is no mention of heretics, persecutors and evil doers, the people of Laodicea are blamed for lack of wholeheartedness.

The word "Laodicean" was used as an adjective to describe someone who is lukewarm in politics, in religion or other matters. The letter of St. John tells that although Laodiceans pretend that they are rich, wealthy and they do not need anything, they are pitiful, poor, blind and naked. Laodiceans are advised to give up their complacency and forget about their famous banks, textiles industries supplying beautiful garments and well known Laodician eye salve and get them from Christ.

Our next visit is to the ancient city of **Aphrodisias**, dedicated to the goddess of love Aphrodite, a Hellenistic city which also flourished under Roman and Byzantine rule. Excavations in the 24-meter-high (78 ft) theater hill have revealed layers of settlement going back to the Bronze Age (c. 2800–2200 B.C.). It was founded in the 5th C B.C. and flourished under the Roman Empire (1st C B.C. - 4th c. AD). Aphrodisias was primarily known as a center of the arts, specifically sculpture.



The Aphrodisias School of Sculpture had a distinctive style and was very well circulated throughout the Greek and Roman world. Lunch en route. Dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: at Korumar Hotel in Kusadasi  
Included meals: B, D

## DAY 08

## Kusadasi / Ephesus / Kusadasi



Today we enjoy a full day tour of Ephesus sites, including visits to the Ephesus ancient site, the Basilica of St. John, and the house of Virgin Mary. Today **Ephesus** is perhaps the world's best-preserved ancient city and its ruins attract visitors from across the globe. An important Christian community arose here, and Ephesus was visited by St. Paul, who later wrote one of his epistles to the Ephesians. Perhaps its greatest claim to fame is the fact that Ephesus once housed the Temple of Diana, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Then continue to Sirince village and have lunch on own at family-run local restaurant. After lunch drive to the House of Virgin Mary. Located on Bulbul Dag (Nightingale Mountain) the **House of the Virgin Mary** is where it's believed that she passed the last years of her life and died. Mary came to Ephesus with St. John and was taken up to Panaghia Kapulu Mountain to survive the Roman persecutions. Today the House of Virgin Mary is recognized as a shrine by the Vatican.

Our last visit of the day is to **The Basilica of St. John**. In the 4th century the Byzantines built a small church over John's tomb and in the 6th century Justinian I built a cathedral which was destroyed by the Arab raids between the 7th and 8th centuries. Today the grave of St. John is recognized as a shrine by the Vatican. Return to Kusadasi early in the evening. Dinner at the hotel.



Overnight: at Korumar Hotel in Kusadasi  
Included meals: B, D

## DAY 09

## Return Home

After breakfast – transfer to Adnan Menderes airport in Izmir for your homebound flight via Istanbul

Overnight: -  
Included meals: B

**OPTIONAL POST-TOUR EXTENSION:**  
**1 night in Kusadasi & day- trip to Patmos Island**

**DAY 10**

**Kusadasi – Patmos – Kusadasi**



After an early breakfast, transfer to the pier and embark a ferry for a day-trip to the island of Patmos. The earliest remains of human settlements on the island date to the Middle Bronze Age (ca 2000 B.C.). Patmos and Christianity were closely linked when in the late 1st century A.D. Emperor Dometian sent the Apostle St. John to exile in Patmos (95-97 A.D.), where he is said to have experienced the terrible visions of the Apocalypse and perhaps to have composed the 4th Gospel. Upon arrival, we will visit the **Monastery of St. John**. The monastery crowns the hill of Chora the hill of Chora

It looks like a Byzantine castle and was built like a fortress. It was founded in 1088 by Ossios Christodoulos via a grant by the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I. Komnenos. The first phase of the building program was carried out by monks especially trained in Constantinople, as well as bachelors from the surrounding islands. We will have lunch at a local restaurant during the tour. In the late afternoon, we will return to Kusadasi by ferry. Dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: at Korumar Hotel in Kusadasi  
Included meals: B, L, D

**DAY 11**

**Return Home**

After breakfast – transfer to Adnan Menderes airport in Izmir for your homebound flight via Istanbul.

Included meals: B

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