



St. John's Pilgrimage to Türkiye Cumhuriyeti April 5–15, 2027 (Information Report #1)

Because you have expressed interest, intent, or commitment to participate in this Pilgrimage, this is the first in a series of Information Reports you will receive from the planning team. Feel free to share it with anyone you think might be similarly interested.

Let's start with a threshold question: Is it safe to travel to Türkiye?

The short answer is “yes,” and please rest assured that Josh, being a good shepherd, would never lead his flock into an unsafe place.

Turkey is listed as Level 2 for travel: “Exercise increased caution.” Other countries on the Level 2 list include France, Germany, the UK, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, and all Western Europe.

The US is also on travel advisory lists by other countries. Their warning? “Exercise increased caution.”

Turks are like Texans in many ways. They are friendly, warm, and approachable. There is only one thing you can do to make them extremely angry (again, like Texans), and that is to insult their Nation or its history. They react very badly (again, like Texans). That happy, tail-wagging Labrador becomes a Belgian Malinois.

You will see one man's photo across the country in every public place. Think George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and FDR all in one, and you have Mustafa Kemal. Atatürk.



Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk)

Will we have a Turkish local with us?

We will be constantly accompanied by an experienced, dependable, English-fluent Turkish colleague whom I have known for years. His name is Ilker Avci, meaning “firstborn hunter” in English. You will sometimes hear me refer to him as “The Hunter.” I trust him completely and encourage you to do so, as well. We will also be joined by his wife, Tuba, and one or both of their daughters. Yes, Tuba is her given name, pronounced as it is spelled. She was named for a tree that is said to grow in heaven, meaning blessedness and bliss. Tuba is as delightful as Ilker. Her sister and her family are now firmly planted in Dallas, Texas.

When should we travel?

We recommend arriving in Istanbul on 4 April to give yourself time to recover from the flight. Istanbul is seven hours ahead of McLean. You can book your return flight for 15 April. As you know, I can't recommend any carrier, except to note that the only direct flight from IAD to IST is on Turkish Airlines. The government owns 49% of the airline and subsidizes prices to encourage tourism. Do a cost comparison, and you will see what I mean. Tourism is a major economic pillar of the economy.

Where will we be staying?

At present, we are finalizing Istanbul lodging and hope to stay at the Pera Palais Hotel (perapalace.com/en). Numerous luminaries have stayed there in the past—Ataturk, Agatha Christie, Ernest Hemingway, Jacqueline Kennedy, and now us!

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Early-to mid-April in Istanbul is also peak time for the Istanbul Tulip Festival. Tulips originated in Central Asia and became an Ottoman symbol before spreading to Europe. We have also identified the following sites for our visits in Istanbul:

- Dolmabahce Palace
- Fener Balat (Jewish and Christian old neighborhoods)
- Tour of Istanbul old city
- Church of Saint Sophia (Hagia Sophia)
- Blue Mosque
- Hippodrome
- Underground Cistern
- Grand Bazaar
- Spice Market
- Rustempasa Mosque
- Bosphorus Cruise

Also, expect an evening seafood feast on the shores of the Bosphorus.

Where else are we going?

Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea. We'll have many more details for you as our planning continues. For now, your Pilgrimage Logistics Planner needs to go to work and hopefully earn some money.

Send your questions to merhabaturkey@stjohnsmclean.org.

Sincerely,

Your Pilgrimage Planning Team