

WONDERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

30 APRIL 2025 - 27 MAY 2025

Tour Cost (\$AUD):\$21,950
Single Supplement (\$AUD):\$5,200

Tour Duration:28 days



OVERVIEW

Wonders of the Ancient World is an exhilarating journey that reveals the remarkable antiquity of two of the most enigmatic countries in the world: Turkey and Greece. This is an extraordinary adventure that unveils some of the region's most iconic natural and historic treasures.

Our journey begins in one of the most thrilling cities in the world – Istanbul – where our three-night stay is beautifully paced to explore bustling bazaars, magnificent mosques and interact with modern Turkish families. We then move into the country's hinterland with a two-night stay at the little visited Ottoman gem of Safranbolu, before heading south to Cappadocia. Our stay here, in a luxurious cave hotel, is crowned with an incredible balloon ride above the otherworldly landscape of rocks, caves, and fairy chimneys. The tour then meanders through Asia Minor via the eclectic town of Konya – home of the legendary philosopher, Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes – to Kusadasi, via the breathtaking ruins of Ephesus. A relaxing three-night Greek Island cruise, which embraces Patmos, Rhodes, Crete and Santorini, takes us into Athens where we explore the remarkable treasures and secret 'nooks' of this great metropolis. The journey then heads to the Peloponnese peninsula through the amazing Corinth Canal and after a two-night stay in Nafplio –the most romantic hamlet on the Aegean – the journey heads north to the staggering sacred precinct of Delphi where stay in the unspoilt mountain village of Arachova. Our final destination in Greece is Meteora, a sweeping landscape of towering rocks, with its famous Byzantine monasteries perched precariously atop. Finally we head back to Athens at the end of our momentous journey!

Tour Fitness Level: Moderate

WONDERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

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TOUR MAP



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ITINERARY

30/04/2025 Australia – Dubai

Depart from your chosen Australian airport on the flight to Dubai.

01/05/2025 Dubai – Istanbul (D)

Depart Dubai Emirates EK 123, 10.45

Arrive Istanbul 14.25

Bridging the continents of Europe and Asia, the amazing city of Istanbul rises above the bustling waterways of the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara and the Golden Horn and retains the glories of three great empires, Byzantine, Roman and Ottoman. This afternoon we explore the colourful Grand Bazaar, the biggest oriental covered market in the world with more than 4,000 shops.

Sirkeci Mansion Hotel

Istanbul

02/05/2025 Istanbul (BLD)

Today we explore the historic heart of the old city including the Hippodrome, built during the Byzantine era for public activities and chariot races. Nearby is the imposing Blue Mosque, with its exquisitely decorated interior and hand-painted tiles. We also visit one of the most remarkable buildings ever constructed, the Basilica of Hagia Sophia, originally used for Christian worship, later converted to a mosque, and now a museum. After lunch we explore the wonders of Topkapi Palace, former residence of the Sultans and political centre of the Ottoman Empire.

03/05/2025 Istanbul (BLD)

After breakfast we board a boat for a fantastic trip along the Bosphorus to Yoros Castle. Here we go ashore at the fishing village of Anadolu Kavagi on the mouth of the Black Sea. A short walk takes us to the

Anatolian Fortress where there are sweeping vistas of the Bosphorus.

04/05/2025 Istanbul – Safranbolu (BLD)

This morning we drive east to the seldom visited Ottoman gem of Safranbolu in the Black Sea region. As its name suggests the town is derived from the precious purple saffron flower that is native to this evergreen province. Harvesting of saffron commences in October and a kilo of these flowers can cost up to USD \$9,500.

Imren Konak Hotel

Safranbolu

05/05/2025 Safranbolu (BLD)

Safranbolu was a thriving caravanserai in the 17th century as travelling traders and merchants passed through on their journeys from east to west along this busy trade route. Little has changed since that time and today the town boasts the best preserved Ottoman architecture in the world. As we wander through the labyrinthine cobbled alleyways, lined with timber-framed mansion of the UNESCO Old Town, we can feel the incredible ambiance of this ancient trading city. The many bazaars are packed with leather, lacework, textiles, wooden craftwork and lokum (Turkish Delight made from saffron). The residents of Safranbolu are unspoilt by tourism and their unreserved hospitality is typical of Turkey's remote interior.

06/05/2025 Safranbolu – Cappadocia (BLD)

Leaving Safranbolu behind, we board our coach and head to the south-east of Turkey and into Asia Minor. After lunch we arrive at Cappadocia, world-famous for its many unique geological, historic and cultural attractions. The region is largely underlain by sedimentary rocks formed in lakes and streams from volcanic eruptions that occurred millions of years ago. These volcanic deposits were soft rocks that

WONDERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

30 APRIL 2025 - 27 MAY 2025

locals could easily carve and shape to form houses, churches and monasteries. The rocks of Cappadocia near Goreme continued to erode into hundreds of spectacular pillars and minaret-like forms, often referred to as 'fairy chimneys'. On arrival we drive to Sunset Hill where we see the extraordinary panorama of the fairy chimneys spread out beneath us.

La Fairy

Cappadocia

07/05/2025 Cappadocia (BLD)

Goreme Open Air Museum is one of the most astonishing monastic sites in the world. It is a complex comprising more than 30 rock-carved churches and chapels containing intricate frescoes that date back to the 9th century. More than a mile of the original city wall remains, showcasing medieval fortifications with 26 defensive towers and a labyrinth of lanes that make up the heart of the old city. Today we explore this remarkable site.

08/05/2025 Cappadocia (BLD)

Before sunrise we head for Goreme to experience perhaps the most spectacular hot air balloon ride in the world. Over the next hour more than a 100 balloons will soar high into the sky. The views are breathtaking as we drift over fairy chimneys, Monks Valley, Imagination Valley, pigeon houses, cave houses and vineyards. From the highest points the magical landscape perpetually changes and from the lowest points we can almost pick fruit from the trees! After breakfast we explore some of Cappadocia's fascinating underground cities where hundreds of thousands of Christians took shelter from the invasion and persecution by the Romans. Some of these sanctuaries are magnificent and are replete with barns, storerooms, fermentation rooms, churches, tunnels, kitchens and even graves.

09/05/2025 Cappadocia – Konya (BLD)

A short drive from Cappadocia lies one of Turkey's cultural gems, Konya, which seamlessly blends religion, points of historical significance and touches of Seljuk culture with very modern surroundings. Steeped in tradition, Konya is a highly conservative enclave that lies in the Central Anatolia Region of Turkey. Possessing an atmosphere of a museum city, it treads a delicate path between its historical significance as the home town of the whirling dervish orders, bastion of Seljuk culture and the abode of the inspirational scholar, poet and founder of the Sufi sect, Mevlana Rumi. We explore the grand bazaar and the stunning Mevlana Museum, tomb of the timeless writer.

Grand Hotel Konya

Konya

10/05/2025 Konya – Pamukkale (BLD)

Early this morning we leave for the southwestern region of the country and another of Turkey's UNESCO attractions, Pamukkale and Hierapolis. Many years ago, Greeks and Romans discovered the curative properties of the warm mineral springs that are found in this area. Predictably, these springs attracted droves of tourists to the place, not only to seek therapeutic comforts, but also to see the magnificence of the hardened calcium bicarbonate cascading over the cliffs. The Pamukkale terraces are made out of travertine, a sedimentary rock that is deposited by water. There are 17 hot springs in the area with temperatures ranging from 35 degrees to 100 degrees. Pamukkale is considered a natural health spa and has long been thought to alleviate asthma and rheumatism as well as provide benefits for the skin and eyes.

Richmond Pamukkale Thermal

Pamukkale

WONDERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

30 APRIL 2025 - 27 MAY 2025

11/05/2025 Pamukkale – Kusadasi (BLD)

Today we explore the ruins of the Roman spa town of Hieropolis and continue onto Kusadasi on the Aegean Sea.

Unique Life Style Hotel

Kusadasi

12/05/2025 Kusadasi – Ephesus – Kusadasi (BLD)

After breakfast take the short drive to the ancient city of Ephesus. The breath-taking ruins of Ephesus date back to 10 BC and have historical and religious significance. Indeed, biblical characters such as Paul, John, and the Virgin Mary visited Ephesus. Many historians believe Saint John wrote his Gospel while in Ephesus, and when the Virgin Mary was dying took her to the green hills of Seljuk, above the city and laid her to rest. It is also a Roman era glory containing extensive collections of ruins including the pièce de résistance, the Great Theatre. With a capacity of 25,000 people, this is where the Apostle Paul delivered the Gospel to the Ephesians condemning pagan worship.

13/05/2025 Kusadasi – Patmos (BLD)

Today we depart from Kusadasi harbour to begin our three-night cruise of the Greek Islands, and by mid-afternoon we reach the Aegean island of Patmos. Patmos is a significant Christian pilgrimage site, best known as the location where the Apostle John received the visions found in the Book of Revelation of the New Testament. During our excursion here we visit the 'Cave of the Apocalypse' where St John is said to have lived and written the book. Later tonight we set sail for Rhodes.

14/05/2025 Rhodes – Crete (BLD)

Early this morning we arrive into Rhodes and begin our half day shore excursion, which includes a visit to Lindos and its impressive Acropolis, and the Doric

Temple of Athena. Later we explore the old town of Rhodes including its medieval castle. The remainder of the day is at leisure to further explore the old town. Overnight we sail to Crete.

15/05/2025 Crete – Santorini (BLD)

This morning we pull into the beautiful harbour of Heraklion, Crete, and during our five hours on the island we visit the spellbinding Palace of Knossos. Later we set sail for Santorini, the most spectacular island in Greece and one of the geological treasures of Europe. On our arrival we explore the villages of Fira and Oia where there are amazing views of the caldera that was created by a volcanic eruption in the 16th-century BC. Overnight we sail to Athens.

16/05/2025 Athens (BLD)

Athens was founded over 5,000 years ago but since the Olympic games of 2004 has reinvented itself with a dynamism and fervour that has been unparalleled. The whole infrastructure of the city has been modernized with many historic districts like the area around the Acropolis, the Plaka and Ermou shopping street now pedestrianised. This morning we visit Syntagma Square at the heart of the city, the Temple of Zeus, the ancient Agora, the incredible Monastiraki bazaar and the atmospheric Plaka district where low lying buildings are a reminder of old Athens. Yet Athens with its long and tumultuous history has a fascinating invisible side – sites and locales that bear the mark of history but are hidden in the urban cityscape. In the afternoon we explore these unknown corners of the metropolis that reveal hidden treasures and legendary tales – some unknown even to locals.

Astor Hotel

Athens

17/05/2025 Athens (BLD)

Our walking tour starts from our superbly located

WONDERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

30 APRIL 2025 - 27 MAY 2025

hotel and we explore the iconic sights of the Parthenon and the Acropolis, visible from almost every part of the city and still the hub around which Athens revolves. This temple city, built in the 5th century BC, serves as a daily reminder to Greeks of their heritage and the city's many transformations. All over the urban basin, rooftops and balconies angle toward the landmark, a block of milky marble atop a steep-sided plateau.

18/05/2025 Athens – Corinth Canal – Nafplio (BLD)

This morning we drive to Nafplio via the Corinth Canal, one of the oldest canals in the world and a vital navigational route in the Greek archipelago that connects the Peloponnese peninsula with the Aegean Sea. The canal's vertical walls are 60 metres in height and it spans a length of 6.3 kilometres enabling ships to save 185 nautical miles. We reach Nafplio by lunch and in the afternoon we start to explore one of the most beautiful and romantic towns in Greece, Nafplio was the first capital of the newly born Greek state between 1823 and 1834. The harbour curves around the magnificent Argolic Gulf and the old town is drenched in beauty and mystical ambience. This living, breathing museum, full of legends, conquerors and revolutions sweeps visitors away with its stunning architecture and Venetian charm.

Castellanno Hotel

Nafplio

19/05/2025 Nafplio (BLD)

This morning we visit the astonishing ancient theatre of Epidaurus which was constructed in the 4th century BC to host religious ceremonial events in honour of god Asclepius, who was famous for his healing powers. Surrounded by lush vegetation, the theatre is renowned for its symmetry and incredible acoustics and still today often host classical music and Opera performances. Close to Epidaurus is the site of Mycenae, one of the most outstanding

archaeological sites in the country, and centre of the Mycenaean civilisation that flourished between 1,600 and 1,000 BC. This ancient town was surrounded by gigantic walls and protected by two female stone lions at the entrance. In the afternoon we visit Palamidi fortress that sits high above Nafplio.

20/05/2025 Nafplio – Kalavriya – Diakopto – Olympia (BLD)

This morning we leave Nafplio for the beautiful historical town of Kalavriya where we board perhaps the most famous 750mm rack railway in Greece, 'Odontotos'. The line was completed by Italian Engineers in 1895 and snakes its way across a dramatic ledge and beneath canopies of plane trees. It then moves through towering cliffs, and squeezes through a narrow tunnel known as 'doors'. The 22.5 kilometre line attracts rail enthusiasts and nature lovers alike. At the end of the line in Diakopto, we board our bus for the western Peloponnese and the village of Olympia.

Amalia Hotel

Olympia

21/05/2025 Olympia (BLD)

Ancient Olympia grew to be the most celebrated sacred sites of ancient Greece, and the birthplace of the Olympic Games almost 3,000 years ago in 776 BC. The most important sporting event in the world, the Olympic Games were about more than just sport: they also represented peace and the nobility of competition. The known world would be united every four years and all hostilities would cease so that everyone could take part in the Games in the true spirit of sportsmanship. But Olympia was not just used every four years for the sporting event, it was also a place where remarkable works of art and culture were created to worship the Greek god Zeus. Today we explore this most extraordinary site.

WONDERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

30 APRIL 2025 - 27 MAY 2025

22/05/2025 Olympia – Delphi (BLD)

Today we leave Olympia and cross the Corinthian Gulf via the impressive suspension bridge of Rion Antirion and then we skirt the coastline that is dotted with picturesque village and uninhabited islands. We then climb onto the lower slopes of Mount Parnassus to reach the mountain town of Delphi. Considered to be one of the most venerable archaeological sites in the country, the sanctuary of Delphi, a famous ancient oracle, is located at the foot of Mount Parnassus and was a major cultural and religious nexus. Dedicated to the god Apollo, the site opens to the Corinthian Gulf in the south becoming a crossroads of natural passages in the heart of the Greek mainland.

Amalia Hotel

Delphi

23/05/2025 Delphi – Meteora (BLD)

This morning we drive north to the vast rock formations of Meteora. Formed some 60 million years ago, continuous tectonic movements pushed the seabed upwards to form a high plateau. The Greek word Meteora means 'suspended in air', which is an apt description for this astonishing preservation of 9th century monastic architecture. Today there are six active monasteries which crown vertical peak tops creating a landscape of inimitable beauty.

Theatro Hotel

Kalambaka

24/05/2025 Meteora (BLD)

This morning we take a gentle hike through this unique geological 'rock forest' to uncover hidden trails, gigantic rock pillars and ruined monasteries. We follow in the footsteps of the first monks who arrived here some 15 centuries ago and learn the history and legends of this staggering UNESCO World Heritage site.

25/05/2025 Meteora – Athens (BLD)

After breakfast we board our coach for the journey south to Athens.

Astor Hotel

Athens

26/05/2025 Athens – Dubai (B)

This morning is at leisure. Later we transfer to the airport for our flight to Dubai.

Depart Athens Emirates EK 210, 18.05

Arrive Dubai 23.35

27/05/2025 Dubai – Australia

Connect with your flight back to Australia.