



WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL
OF GREATER HOUSTON
Global Perspectives, Local Conversations

September 18-26, 2026

TURKEY

Cappadocia & Istanbul

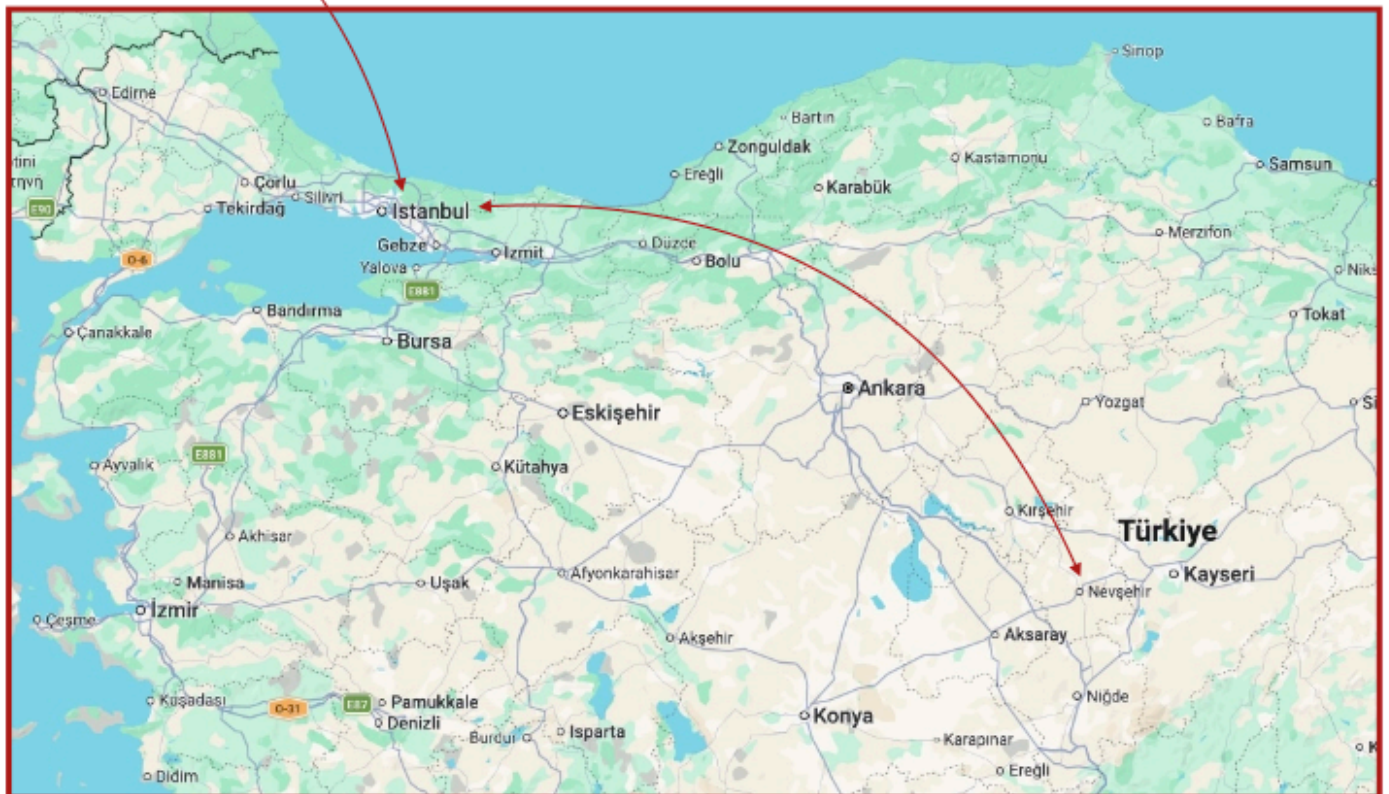




ITINERARY

DAY 1	Fri, Sep 18	Leave USA	
DAY 2	Sat, Sep 19	Istanbul arrival. Fly to Cappadocia.	Cappadocia
DAY 3	Sun, Sep 20	Cappadocia sightseeing.	Cappadocia
DAY 4	Mon, Sep 21	Cappadocia sightseeing.	Cappadocia
DAY 5	Tue, Sep 22	Fly to Istanbul.	Istanbul
DAY 6	Wed, Sep 23	Istanbul sightseeing.	Istanbul
DAY 7	Thu, Sep 24	Istanbul sightseeing.	Istanbul
DAY 8	Fri, Sep 25	Istanbul leisure day.	Istanbul
DAY 9	Sat, Sep 26	Departure.	

MAP TRAJECTORY





HIGHLIGHTS

- Göreme Open Air Museum and its rock-cut churches
- Uçhisar Village and panoramic views over Cappadocia
 - Derinkuyu Underground City
 - Pigeon Valley and its historic dovecotes
- Traditional Turkish carpet-weaving workshop
- Mustafapaşa and the Church of Constantine and Helen
 - Paşabağ's iconic fairy chimneys
- Zelve Valley's ancient cave settlement
 - Avanos pottery workshop
 - Hagia Sophia
- Blue Mosque and the Byzantine Hippodrome
 - Topkapi Palace
 - Grand Bazaar
- Chora Church and its Byzantine mosaics
 - Süleymaniye Mosque
 - Basilica Cistern
- Egyptian Bazaar, also known as the Spice Bazaar
 - Bosphorus cruise between Europe and Asia
- Leisure time to explore Istanbul independently



INCLUDED

Hotel accommodation in listed hotels with daily breakfast.

Arrival and departure transfers for suggested flights.

Meals as indicated in the itinerary.

All entry fees for above-mentioned places.

Private English speaking guides in each location.

Private transportation with driver.

Service charges for included meals.

Local taxes.

NOT INCLUDED

International and domestic airfare.

Visa fees if applicable.

Drinks with included meals, except drinking water and tea or coffee for breakfast.

Gratuities for guides and drivers.

Personal expenditures like phone calls, laundry, medical expenses.

Travel insurance.

SUGGESTED FLIGHTS

Suggested flights are on Turkish Airlines and partner airlines:

18 Sep TK 134	Houston to Istanbul dep: 02:30 pm / arr: 10:25 am on Sep 19
19 Sep TK 2006	Istanbul to Nevsehir dep: 01:55 pm / arr: 3:10 pm
22 Sep TK 2007	Nevsehir to Istanbul dep: 03:55 pm / arr: 5:25 pm
26 Sep TK 33	Istanbul to Houston dep: 02:25 pm / arr: 7:20 pm

Economy class: \$1,650

Business class: \$5,930

Fares are per person, including taxes, surcharges and fees as of July 31, 2026.

Fares may change based on availability.

Preferred Travel Partner

UNITED



September 18-26, 2026
9 Days - 7 nights

ACCOMMODATIONS

Taskonaklar Cave Hotel

Cappadocia

taskonaklar.com



Sura Design Suites

Istanbul

surahotels.com



September 18-26, 2026
9 Days - 7 nights



PROGRAM DETAILS

Day 1: Friday, September 18

Leave USA

You will leave Houston for Istanbul, Turkey.

Overnight en route

Meals: -

Day 2: Saturday, September 19

Istanbul - Cappadocia

Upon arrival in Cappadocia, your guide & driver will meet you at the airport and will transfer you to your hotel.

Rest of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Cappadocia

Meals: -



Day 3: Sunday, September 20

Cappadocia

After breakfast, your journey begins with a visit to the Göreme Open Air Museum, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that offers a rare glimpse into early Christian life in the region. Carved into soft volcanic rock, this monastic complex of rock-cut churches and chapels is adorned with vivid frescoes dating back to the 10th century. Each cave tells the story of a bygone era when the region was a refuge for monks and religious communities. Next, travel to Uçhisar Village, crowned by its natural rock citadel—the highest point in Cappadocia. Used since ancient times as a lookout, this towering formation offers panoramic views over the magical landscape of fairy chimneys, valleys, and distant mountains. The village's stone houses and narrow alleys reflect traditional Cappadocian architecture and provide a window into the daily life of its inhabitants.

From the heights of Uçhisar, descend into the depths of history at the Derinkuyu Underground City. This astonishing multi-level city, reaching over 60 meters below the surface, once sheltered thousands of people. Believed to date back to the 8th century BCE and expanded during Byzantine times, it includes living quarters, stables, churches, and ventilation shafts—ingeniously engineered to provide refuge during invasions. Pause for a scenic view of Pigeon Valley, named for the countless dovecotes carved into its cliffs. These pigeon houses were once vital to local agriculture, providing fertilizer for the vineyards and fields. The valley's scenic trail is dotted with viewpoints that reveal the striking natural forms and colors of Cappadocia's volcanic terrain.

In the afternoon, step into the rich artisanal heritage of the region with a visit to a local carpet workshop. Here, you'll witness the age-old tradition of Turkish carpet weaving, where every knot and pattern carries centuries of symbolism and craft. Learn how natural dyes, hand-spun wool, and silk threads are transformed into masterpieces—each carpet telling its own story.

Overnight in Cappadocia

Meals: B –L

Your morning begins in the tranquil town of Mustafapaşa, formerly known as Sinasos, once a thriving Greek Orthodox settlement until the population exchange of 1923. As you stroll its quiet lanes, you'll notice elegant stone mansions with arched doorways and Greek inscriptions—testaments to a prosperous past built on trade and craftsmanship. The highlight here is the Church of Constantine and Helen, a 19th-century Orthodox church named after the Roman Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena, who famously embraced Christianity. The church's serene interior, adorned with faded frescoes and stone carvings, evokes the spiritual devotion of its former congregation.

From Sinasos, journey into the surreal dreamscape of Paşabağ, also known as the Valley of the Monks. This is where Cappadocia's iconic "fairy chimneys" are at their most dramatic —tall, conical rock formations often topped with large basalt caps. Early Christian hermits, seeking solitude, carved small cells and chapels into these formations, living in isolation amid nature's majesty. You'll visit a hermit's dwelling hewn into one of the fairy chimneys and admire the serene simplicity of a monk's life surrounded by sculpted stone and open sky.

Continue to Zelve Valley, a sprawling troglodyte settlement that was once among the most densely populated cave towns in the region. Spread across three canyons, Zelve was inhabited from the 9th century until the 1950s. Here, you'll explore a maze of rock-cut dwellings, chapels, and storage rooms—all abandoned but still whispering stories of the people who once lived, prayed, and worked among these rocks. Unlike Göreme, Zelve's churches are more austere, offering insight into the simpler aesthetic of early Christian communities. The landscape is both haunting and beautiful, an open-air museum that brings Cappadocia's history vividly to life.

After lunch in a local restaurant, the day winds down with a visit to Avanos, a riverside town famous for its red clay pottery—a tradition that dates back to the Hittites over 3,000 years ago. Situated on the banks of the Kızılırmak (Red River), Avanos still thrives as a center of artisan craft. You'll visit a family-run pottery workshop where you can watch master potters spin intricate designs on foot-powered wheels and, if you wish, try your hand at shaping a pot yourself. The warmth of the artisans and the continuity of this age-old craft make this stop a deeply personal cultural experience.

Overnight in Cappadocia

Meals: B - L

You will have a leisurely morning in Cappadocia. Before noon, you will be transferred to Nevsehir airport for your flight to Istanbul. Upon arrival, you will be welcomed and transferred to your hotel in the historic center of the city. Rest of the afternoon at leisure.

Overnight in Istanbul

Meals: B

Experience the heart of old Istanbul on a full-day guided tour that weaves together the city's Byzantine grandeur, Ottoman majesty, and vibrant everyday culture. Step into a living museum of civilizations as you walk the historic peninsula that has been the capital of empires for over 1,500 years.

Your day begins at the awe-inspiring Hagia Sophia, one of the greatest architectural achievements in the world. Originally built in 537 AD by Emperor Justinian as a Byzantine cathedral, it stood as the largest church in Christendom for nearly a thousand years. Converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest in 1453 and now functioning as a mosque again, Hagia Sophia is a marvel of domes, mosaics, and layered symbolism—where Islamic calligraphy hangs alongside golden Christian mosaics, revealing the city's layered spiritual history.

A short stroll away stands the Blue Mosque (Sultan Ahmet Mosque), one of the jewels of Ottoman architecture. Built in the early 17th century, it's famous for its six slender minarets and interior lined with over 20,000 handmade Iznik tiles in striking blue hues. As you step inside, the soft light filtering through hundreds of stained-glass windows creates a sense of serene majesty, reflecting the Ottomans' refined artistic sensibility. Next, explore the Hippodrome, once the social and political heart of Byzantine Constantinople. This grand public arena hosted chariot races, imperial ceremonies, and public gatherings for over a thousand years. Today, the site is marked by evocative monuments such as the Serpent Column, Obelisk of Theodosius, and the German Fountain, each a relic of empires that once ruled this legendary city.

Enjoy free time for lunch in the Sultanahmet district, where you can choose from a variety of charming cafés and restaurants offering Turkish specialties—from savory kebabs and rich stews to flaky börek and sweet baklava. It's a perfect chance to savor local flavors in a historic setting.

In the afternoon, step into the opulent world of the sultans at Topkapi Palace, the administrative center and royal residence of the Ottoman Empire for nearly four centuries. Set atop a bluff overlooking the Bosphorus, the palace complex includes lavish courtyards, ornate chambers, and the priceless treasures of the Imperial Treasury. Highlights include the Harem, once home to the sultan's family and concubines, and the Chamber of the Holy Relics, displaying revered artifacts of Islamic history.

Conclude your day at the bustling and colorful Grand Bazaar, one of the oldest and largest covered markets in the world. With over 4,000 shops under its vaulted ceilings, the bazaar is a labyrinth of treasures—handwoven carpets, silks, ceramics, spices, jewelry, and antiques. Whether you're hunting for a keepsake or simply soaking up the atmosphere, this is the perfect place to experience the energy and artistry of Istanbul's commercial soul.

Uncover the deeper layers of Istanbul's history on a day filled with sacred art, ingenious architecture, and sweeping views from land and water. This immersive journey takes you beyond the imperial core to discover the city's Byzantine treasures, Ottoman brilliance, and vibrant waterfront life.

The morning begins with a visit to the Chora Church, known today as the Kariye Mosque, located in the historically rich Edirnekapi district. Originally built as a Byzantine monastery in the 4th century and later rebuilt in the 11th century, this church is famed for its breathtaking mosaics and frescoes from the 14th century—some of the finest examples of late Byzantine art. Scenes of the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary shimmer in gold and jewel tones, offering a moving and intimate glimpse into medieval devotion and artistry. Although now a mosque again, many of these masterpieces remain on display, speaking to the enduring legacy of Constantinople's sacred art.

Continue to the imposing Süleymaniye Mosque, crowning one of Istanbul's seven hills. Built by the great Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan for Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent in the 16th century, this mosque complex is not only a spiritual center but also an architectural masterpiece. Its harmonious proportions, soaring dome, and serene interior reflect the classical period of Ottoman design. You'll also see the mausoleums of the sultan and his beloved wife Hürrem (Roxelana), and enjoy panoramic views of the Golden Horn from the courtyard—a peaceful moment above the city's bustle.

Next, descend into the hidden depths of ancient Constantinople with a visit to the Basilica Cistern (Yerebatan Sarnıcı), an extraordinary subterranean reservoir built in the 6th century under Emperor Justinian. This forest of marble columns once held the city's water supply and is now an atmospheric space of dim lights and reflections. As you walk along its raised pathways, keep an eye out for the enigmatic Medusa heads repurposed as column bases—symbols that continue to spark legend and intrigue. Enjoy free time for lunch, with many options nearby ranging from traditional Ottoman cuisine to modern interpretations of Turkish fare. This is the perfect time to relax before the afternoon's cultural highlights.

Your next stop is the Egyptian Bazaar (Spice Bazaar), built in the 17th century as part of the Yeni Mosque complex. This bustling covered market is filled with the fragrant colors of saffron, sumac, dried fruits, Turkish delight, herbal teas, and every spice imaginable. It's a sensory feast and a chance to explore Istanbul's role as a historic crossroads of commerce between East and West.

The day concludes with a cruise along the Bosphorus, the legendary strait that separates Europe and Asia. As you glide between continents, you'll pass ornate Ottoman palaces, wooden yalis (waterside mansions), elegant mosques, and ancient fortresses, all set against the shimmering waters of the strait. The cruise offers an unforgettable perspective on Istanbul's geography, history, and timeless allure.

Day 8: Friday, September 25

Istanbul at Leisure

After two days of immersive touring through the marvels of Istanbul's imperial past and cultural present, today is yours to explore at your own pace. Whether you choose to unwind, dive deeper into a specific interest, or simply get lost in the city's atmosphere, Istanbul offers countless possibilities to make your free day memorable. A number of the activities can include: trying the traditional Turkish Bath; visiting a number of the fabulous museums like: Istanbul Archaeological Museum, Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Museum of Modern Art; walking to Taksim Square and Istiklal St., modern center of the city to the north of historic peninsula; visiting the 19th century Dolmabahce Palace.

Enjoy this historic city!

Overnight in Istanbul

Meals: B

Day 9: Saturday, September 26

Departure

After a leisurely morning, you will be transferred to Istanbul airport for your return flight.

Meals: B





wachouston.org

travel@wachouston.org

713-522-7811