



A panoramic view from the Azamara Journey pulling into the Port of Kusadasi.

## Turkey Blessings

LEARNING THE LEGENDS OF AN ANCIENT CULTURE

EVERYONE HAS A DREAM DESTINATION that pulls at their heart strings and piques their interest. At the top of my Wanderlist lies Turkey, a land where religion and family come first and where culture is driven by the spirit of the people.

The port city of Kusadasi is the nautical gateway to Turkey's ancient history and is located 20 minutes away from the ancient city of Ephesus. Conquered by the Romans in 129 BC, Ephesus quickly became a prosperous and thriving metropolis, but due to unstable environmental circumstances, it was fully destroyed by a catastrophic earthquake in AD 614.

To this day, Ephesus's secrets lie buried beneath

the surface, along with 75% of the original ancient city. Half of what is known of Ephesus is interpreted through written word. Further knowledge comes from what has been excavated, with archeologists estimating that only 25% of this lost city has been unearthed. The Book of Revelation states that St. John the Evangelist and the Virgin Mary came to Ephesus later in life to write the Gospel at the Basilica of St. John.

A religious and archeological masterpiece, the Basilica of St. John is shrouded in legend and mystery. Currently under excavation, the church vault, walls, and floors are enshrined in mosaic, with marble adorning the pillars. Enormous Turkish rugs are splashed throughout the main façade.

Directly below the excavation site is a crypt containing the tomb of St. John himself.

There is so much to see in Ephesus, between the Basilica of St. John, Library of Celcius, Temple of Hadrian, the Theatre, Odeon, and the House of the Virgin Mary. To fully experience Ephesus, we desired a truly culturally immersive experience, best organized by our Virtuoso preferred touring partners at Travelive. Specializing and based in Greece and Turkey, Travelive is expert in crafting highly customized touring itineraries.


### A PERSONAL TOUR

Through Travelive we met our wonderful guide, Burak. A native of Ephesus, this kindred soul



*A Golden Tribute to the Virgin Mary at Meryem Ana Evi, the House of the Virgin Mary.*

was an absolute delight for us to have at the helm of our private group tour. Burak's charisma captivated us to our core. He energized us through storytelling, while educating us on the legends of his ancient culture. As the day progressed, Burak's love for his family, for the people of Turkey, and for his culture spoke volumes as to his character and worldview. After our full day of touring, Burak invited us for an impromptu dinner with his wife and sister. Those of us with prior engagements cancelled plans for the evening, all in favor of spending more time with Burak. We drank wine, trading stories with his wonderful family for hours, solidifying the love I felt for Turkey and its' people, leaving knowing I'd be forever grateful for the experience.

Our day spent in Ephesus with Burak touched on much bigger themes of support and tolerance, radiating through the streets of Turkey. It is not uncommon to see Muslims and Christians supporting one another, together, in their respective houses of worship. Experiencing this firsthand invoked a sense of deep inner peace that I hadn't experienced before. With the U.S. media constantly invoking fear regarding travel to Turkey, we were initially concerned about personal safety. By the end of the trip, any feelings of unease seemed extraordinarily trivial. We left Turkey enlightened, grateful for the eternal blessings it bestowed upon us. 

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*Ken Taheny and Lisa Torgerson at ease in Ephesus. Ongoing reconstruction of Ephesus Stadium is in the background.*



*On the surface of the Tomb of St. John in Ephesus, Turkey.*



*ABOVE: The Library of Celsus is rumored to hold 12,000 scrolls entombed in marble sarcophaguses.*



*RIGHT: Our private tour guide Burak, the consummate professional. Touring services were arranged via Virtuoso-preferred on-site for Turkey, Travelive.*

*LEFT: A mosaic floor entry at the Tomb of St. John. The area is currently under excavation.*

