



Ağrı Dağı (Mt. Ararat)

EASTERN TURKEY

The Toros (Taurus) Mountains paralleling Turkey's southern border, and the Black Sea Mountains in the north meet to form a mighty range which defines the country's eastern border.

The tremendous diversity of the eastern and southeastern lands surprises travellers: the red ochre plateau of Erzurum; the forests, waterfalls, and green pastures of Kars and Ağrı; the permanent snow-cap on biblical Mount Ağrı (Ararat); and the immense Lake Van with its deep blue waters. Dwellings and ways of life also vary greatly in this large region. For example, small, earth-roofed houses, built close to the ground typify Kars. Despite a gener-



Doğubayazıt, Ağrı

ally austere life, the people of Kars are generous and hospitable.

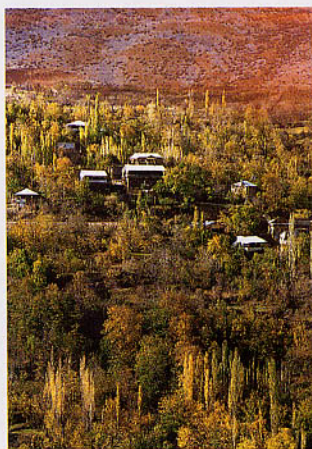
The region's long and turbulent history has left monuments to its various civilizations: Byzantine monasteries and churches, Seljuk mausoleums and caravanserais, and elegant Ottoman mosques and hilltop citadels. To the inveterate traveller and lover of adventure, this region of Turkey fascinates, astonishes and informs.

FROM ERZINCAN TO DOĞUBAYAZIT

The great trans-Anatolian axis road is the most direct route between Ankara and the Iranian border, and passes through Sivas, Erzincan, Erzurum, Ağrı and Doğubayazıt.

Erzincan, the principal city of its province, lies 688 km east of Ankara on a fertile plain. The highly-decorated and hand-fashioned copperware of Erzincan maintains a long tradition in the area's fame for metalwork. **Akbulut Ski Center**, 40 km to the west, provides facilities for winter sports enthusiasts. **Dumanlı Plateau** in Refahiye County is a relaxing location among pine trees. The elevations of the ski center and plateau are both 2000 m. Erzincan has two sports clubs that play **Cirit**, a javelin game of daredevil horsemanship in which wooden javelins are thrown at horsemen of opposing teams to gain points. The game is played mainly in Eastern Turkey.

Many of the magnificent bronze objects in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara were found at the nearby Urartian site of **Altuntepe**, east of Erzincan. The items date from 900-600 B.C. At **Tercan**, the round 12th-century mausoleum of Mama Hatun with its beautifully carved stone portal is worth a detour off the main road. The waterfalls at **Girvelik**, 29 km southeast of Erzincan, provide ideal picnic



Kemaliye, Erzincan

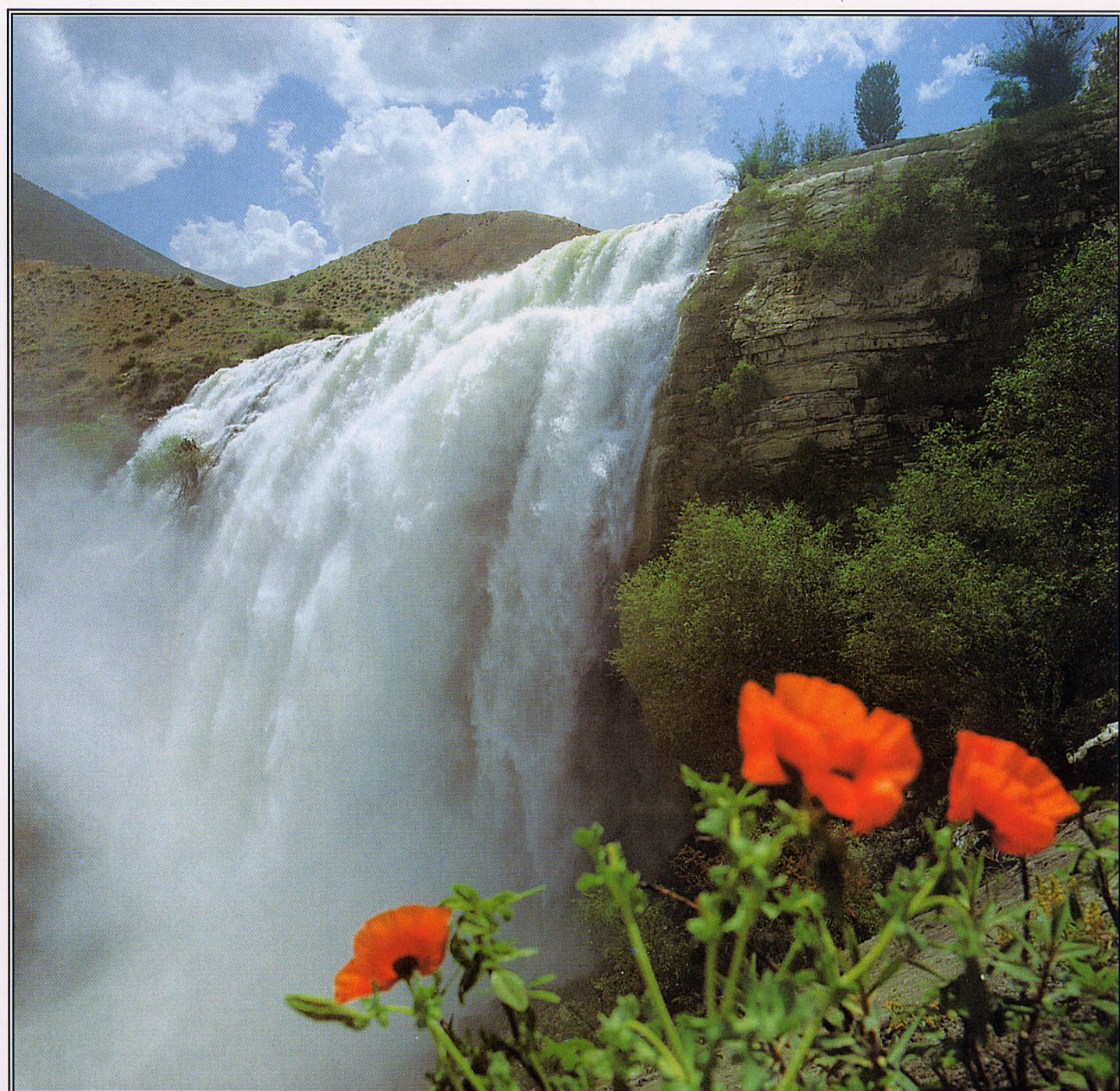


Copper crafting, Erzincan

spots where you can eat a packed lunch and relax to the sound of water tumbling over rocks. Southwest of Erzincan is the beautiful green town of **Kemaliye** on the **Fırat (Euphrates) River**. The hospitality of the locals and the architecture of the town are worth a visit. The best place for rafting and canoeing is at nearby **Karanlık Boğaz**. You will also want to go on a photo safari to take in the natural beauty of the area.

Erzurum, 193 km east of Erzincan and the largest city in eastern Anatolia, sprawls on a high plateau at an altitude of 1,950 meters. As you enter the city, the large Aziziye monument commemorating the Turkish-Russian war will catch your eye.

Although the collection in the archeological museum reveals much of the city's history and ancient origins, it is Erzurum's architecture which is in fact the best picture of its past. The city walls and fortress are reminiscent of the period of Byzantine rule. The 5th-century citadel built by Emperor Theodosius stands on a hill at an altitude of 2000 meters. Of particular importance are the remaining Seljuk buildings - brilliant examples of a fascinating aesthetic. The Ulu Cami (Grand Mosque) was built in 1179 by Melik Nasreddin Mehmet (Mehmet the Red Lion). It has an unusual form with seven



Tortum Waterfall, Erzurum



Palandöken Ski Center, Erzurum

wide naves. The Çifte Minareli Medrese, or theological college, built by the Seljuk Sultan Alaeddin Keykubat in 1253, astonishes visitors with elaborate stone carvings on its portal and its majestic double minarets. Behind the Çifte Minareli Medrese stands the Üç Kümbetler, a group of three tombs, the most notable of which is that of Emir Saltuk. The 13th-century Hatuniye Türbesi, or mausoleum, was built for Sultan Alaeddin Keykubat's daughter. The beautiful portal and richly-tiled minaret of the 13th-century Yakutiye Medrese reveal another facet of Seljuk architecture. You can also see Ottoman buildings in Erzurum. The great architect Sinan left his mark on the city in the Lala Mustafa Paşa Mosque. The Atatürk house and museum where Atatürk stayed and held a congress are near the mosque.

While wandering around the city, notice the local black stone (Erzurum Oltu Taşı) which is used in jewelry. The shops on the upper floor of the Taşhan (Rüstem Paşa Caravanserai) offer the best selection.

A road through splendid mountain scenery leads to the winter sports resort of **Palandöken**, only 6 km from Erzurum. This center has a number of hotels as well as the longest ski run and the best snow quality in Turkey, making it a favorite haunt of expert skiers. The glassy **Tortum Lake**, 120 km from Erzurum in the direction of Artvin and the Black Sea, may be the most tranquil sight in all of Turkey. Be sure to see the **Tortum Waterfalls** at the north end of the lake, that plunge from a height of 47 meters. (After the rushing torrents of the April-to-June snow-melt clears the falls, the flow of water slows considerably.)



**Twin Minaret Medrese,
Erzurum**



**Minaret detail from the
Yakutiye Medrese, Erzurum.**



Akkoyunlu Bridge, Erzurum

The Haho Church in Bağbaşı Village in Tortum County was built by the Georgian King David the Great during the years 961-1001. It was originally built as a monastery. The church section is now used as the village mosque while preserving the original architecture. It is 85 km from Erzurum on the Erzurum-Artvin highway, 8 km from the whitewashed bridge. The mansion in Çamlıyamaç Village in Uzundere County, 7 km off the Erzurum-Artvin highway was also built by David the Great near the end of the 10th century. It reflects the golden age of Georgian architecture.

Kars (212 km northeast of Erzurum) stands at an altitude of 1,750 meters and has played an important role in Turkish history. It was at the center of the Turko-Russian War. The Russian legacy can still be seen in much of the town's architecture. The lower city unfolds at the foot of an impressive Seljuk fortress from the 12th century. Nearby, the Havariler Museum (the 10th-century Church of the Apostles) reveals a curious mixture of architectural influences. Bas-reliefs representing the twelve apostles in rather stiff and primitive poses, ring the exterior drum of the dome. The Archeological Museum houses beautiful wood carvings, an excellent collection of coins found in the surrounding region, as well as many ethnographic items relating to eastern Turkey. Kars is particularly known for its distinctive kilims and carpets, and it retains a strong heritage of folk dancing. Visitors always seem to enjoy this traditional entertainment. On the mountain pastures, villagers produce excellent Kaşar cheese and delicious honey.



Kars Citadel

About 42 kilometers east of the city on the ancient Silk Road, the medieval city of **Ani (Ocaklı)** lies mostly in ruins. Impressive fortified walls still encircle the ruins of numerous churches, mosques and caravanserais. The extent to which the large churches are still standing after a thousand years will amaze you. **Sarıkamış** (53 km southwest of Kars) is a ski center with resort hotels set in a scenic pine forest.



Gold leaf icon, Kars Archeology Museum

The **Kür River** divides **Ardahan** (83 km from Kars) and separates the ancient part on one side from the new city on the other. A 16th-century castle built by Sultan Selim the Grim, one of the most stately citadels in

Turkey with 14 towers and a span of 745 meters, stands in the old part of the city. To the north of Ardahan via **Posof** lies the **Türkgözü** border gate which is now open for travel to the Republic of Georgia.

Çıldır takes its name from the nearby lake which lies at an altitude of 1,965 meters. The scenic area around the lake provides a habitat for a fascinating variety of birds. In the lake, the man made **Akçakale Island** was reputedly constructed with the labor of thousands; a temple with Urartian inscriptions remains. **Şeytan (Devil's) Castle** is near Çıldır.

The city of **Iğdır** stands on a large, fertile plain where fruit and, unusual for this geographical region, cotton grow. The Bible relates that when the flood waters receded, Noah and his family descended from Mount Ağrı (Ararat) toward the fertile plain. From here, their progeny most likely settled to the south and west along the Firat (Euphrates) and Dicle (Tigris) Rivers, establishing the second generation of mankind. From this plain, you have the best view of Mount Ağrı. Monuments to visit near the city include Urartian rock monuments, a 13th-century Seljuk caravanserai and the Karakale (Black Castle). In **Karakoyun Village**, on the road between Iğdır and **Aralık**, stop at the impressive 15th-century cemeteries with Karakoyun (Black Sheep) monumental tombstones.

Ağrı, a provincial capital on a 1,650-meter-high plateau, takes its name from the mountain which looms over it. Ağrı is 183 km east of Erzurum. The pleasant **Bahık Gölü** (Fish Lake) to the northeast, not surprisingly has plenty of fish restaurants serving local delicacies. Thermal springs bubble up all over the area. For those who want hardy outdoor events, a visit to the **Eleşkirt Ski Center**, 20 km southwest of Ağrı, will provide a few days of snow sports.

Do not miss the spectacular **Ishak Paşa Palace**, 5 km from **Doğubayazıt**, 95 km east of Ağrı. Ishak Paşa, Ottoman governor of the province, and Çolak Abdi Paşa constructed the palace between 1685 and 1784 with a mixture of Ottoman, Persian, and Seljuk architectural styles. The palace con-



Church ruins, Ani, Kars



Devil's Castle, Cıldır-Kars



Detail from the İshak Paşa Palace, Doğubayazıt-Ağrı

tains 366 rooms, a mosque, a courtroom, a kitchen, a bakery, and barns and baths. Nearby you can see a bas-relief of an Urartian king, and a rock tomb from the ninth century B.C.

Near Doğubayazıt, Turkey's most scenic natural monument, **Ağrı Dağı** (Mt. **Ararat**) rises to a height of 5137 meters. Some scientists who have explored the mountain believe Noah's ark is buried under snow and ice high on the mountain. Lesser Ararat is 3925 meters high. **Üzengili** village, 25 km east of Doğubayazıt is a great place to try the local dessert, aşure (Noah's Pudding), believed to have first been made by Noah's wife from the last bits of food in the ark.

There is a meteorite crater 35 m wide and 60 m deep which was created in the early 1900's between Sarıçevuş Village and the Turkish-Iranian border gate of Gürbulak.



Diyadin Hot Spring, Ağrı



Ishak Paşa Palace, Doğubayazıt, Ağrı

FROM MALATYA TO HAKKARI

The most direct route to this region is the Central Anatolian Highway that passes through **Kayseri, Malatya, Elazığ, Bingöl, Muş, Van** and on to Iran, via **Hakkari**.

Malatya (670 km east of Ankara) is a busy city situated on a fertile plain at the foot of the **Anti-Taurus Mountains**. The archeology museum houses new finds from the Lower Firat (Euphrates) region that date from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic ages. Next to the city museum, you can shop in a bazaar where an entire passageway of shops is devoted to copperware. In Malatya, the apricot growing center of Turkey, it is possible to sample many delicious apricot confections as well as other fresh and dried fruit. The two small towns which pre-date the establishment of present-day Malatya are easy expeditions. **Aslantepe**, 7 km away, was the capital of a Hittite state in the first millennium B.C., and **Battalgazi**, 9 km away, was once the ancient city of **Melitene**. At the latter stand the ruins of a Byzantine enclosure, and in the center of town, the 13th-century Ulu Mosque is an excellent example of Seljuk architecture.

Elazığ, founded in the 19th century, lies on a plain in the shadow of a mountain crowned with the ancient citadel of **Harput**. Harput was an important educational and cultural center. Destruction wrought by several earthquakes and the



Harput Castle, Elazığ



Fishing in Keban Lake, Elazığ

relatively recent construction of Elazığ has led to most of the population of Harput deserting it for the modern city. Several Seljuk mosques remain, however, which are worth visiting. The **Keban** and **Karakaya Dams** on the Firat (Euphrates) River have created huge artificial lakes, dramatically altering the surrounding environment. Twenty-five kilometers south of Elazığ, the lovely and tranquil **Hazar Lake** invites relaxation. The beaches and touristic facilities are open during the summer months. Nine beaches on the shores of Lake Hazar have received the blue flag rating. Mount Hazar Baba is a beautiful place for a hike, and will soon be open for skiing as well.

High mountains encircle **Tunceli**, 133 km north of Elazığ on the Elazığ-Erzurum road. On the way, stop off to see the fortress of **Pertek**, built in the Middle Ages and still in good condition today. In the **Munzur Valley National Park** near **Ovacık**, 60 km northwest of Tunceli, you can fish in rushing, trout-filled streams while enjoying the amazing scenery.

The name of **Bingöl** means "a thousand lakes." It was given because of the many glacier lakes in the surrounding mountains. In the city stand the remains of a medieval fortress. **Bingöl-Yolçatı (Kurucadağ) Ski Center** is 20 km to the west. At various times in history, Bingöl has been controlled by Seljuks, Mongolians, Akkoyuns, Persians, and Ottomans.



Munzur Mountains, Crater Lake, Tunceli



Tombstones, Ahlat-Bitlis



Mosque Domes, Adilcevaz, Bitlis

Muş (115 km east of Bingöl) was founded in the sixth century. The Ulu Cami (Grand Mosque) is an Ottoman work from the second half of the 14th century. The Historical Murat Bridge, 10 km from Muş on the Muş-Varto road, is a Seljuk bridge with 12 arches. The 17th and 18th century mosques of Hacı Şeref and Alaaddin Bey are certainly worth a visit. **Korkuteli** is famous for its kilim weaving and Siirt blankets; it is definitely worth seeing. Varto County contains an old Urartian site in Kayalı Dere Village. Lake Hamurpet, 20 km from Varto, is a good place to fish for trout or hunt ducks and geese. Malazgirt County



**Usta Şagirt Mausoleum
Ahlat, Bitlis**

was the location where the Seljuks defeated the Byzantines in 1071. Today, there are four interesting castles, bridges, and tumuli worth seeing. Bulanık County contains the Mollakent Mosque and Theological School, both built of Ahlat stone by Şeyh Ibrahim in 1290 and 1321 respectively. Lake Kazan is a good spot for fishing and picnics.

The lively city of **Bitlis** (85 km east of Muş), an important center of tobacco production, stands in the middle of a green oasis. The city's architecture uses the local dark stone, and the stone monuments

include the Şerefhan Medrese, the 12th-century Ulu Mosque, the Seljuk Gökmeşdanı Mosque and the Ottoman Şerefiye Mosque. **Bitlis Sapgör Ski Center** is close to the town's center. From **Tatvan** on the western shore of Lake Van (25 km northeast of Bitlis), you can take a

passenger and train ferry across the water to Van. **Nemrut Dağı (Mount Nemrut**, not to be confused with Nemrut Dağı National Park in the province of Adıyaman) makes a challenging climb. In its center a deep crater lake bubbles with volcanic hot springs.



Kaya Çelebi Mosque, Old Van

The ruins of **Ahlat** are 44 km north of Tatvan on the western shore of Lake Van. The ruins of this once-important city of Turkish art and culture are scattered today among more recent constructions. In the 12th century this city was the capital of the Turkish state that ruled the Van Basin. Several mausoleums, notably the Ulu Kümbet, the Bayındır Kümbet, the Hasan Paşa Kümbet and the Çifte Kümbet offer a comprehensive overview of Seljuk funerary architecture and decoration. In the Seljuk cemetery are beautifully inscribed



Tatvan, Bitlis

memorial tombstones from the 12th century. The Turkish Art Museum houses a collection of ceramics, ancient coins and jewelry. Modern Ahlat provides lake side tourist accommodation, beach facilities and restaurants.

As you drive on around the lake you come to **Adilcevaz**, where the Ulu Mosque, built of the region's dark volcanic stone, stands on the lake shore. Ten kilometers west of Adilcevaz is **Kef Castle**, and the



Twin Mausoleums, Old Van

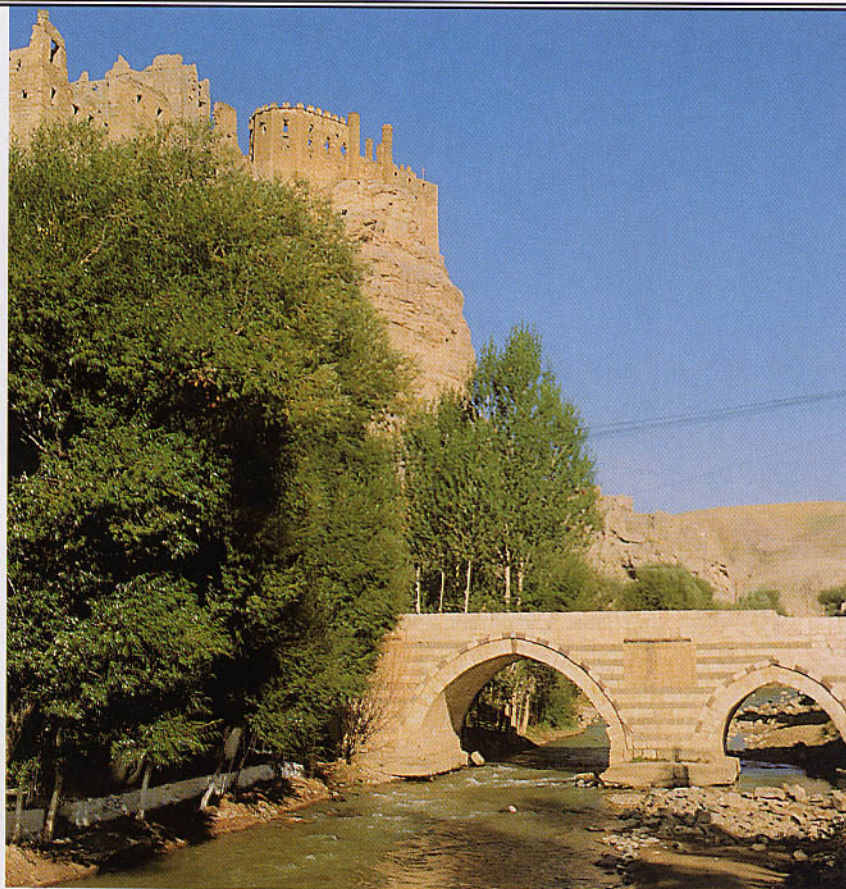


Akdamar Island, Van

nearby Urartian temple of **Haldi** dates from the ninth century B.C. Artifacts from this site can be seen in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara. The Adilcevaz High School yard displays some of the column bases.

Van (170 km east of Bitlis), the ancient Urartian capital of **Tuşpa**, tempts visitors with its location on the eastern shore of the lake. This remote but important city is set in a verdant oasis at the foot of a rocky peak. An imposing 9th-century B.C. citadel overlooks the new and the old parts of town. Steps carved in the rock lead to the Urartian fortress. Halfway up the steps, inscriptions in cuneiform pay homage to Xerxes. Within the fortress are several Urartian royal rock tombs. In the old city, the Ulu Mosque, Hüsrev Paşa Mosque, Kaya Çelebi Mosque and the İkiz Kümbet (Twin Mausoleums) reflect Seljuk and Ottoman architectural styles. Van's interesting Archeological Museum is in the new city, inland from the uninhabited old district. Still very much part of a traditional lifestyle, the women of Van produce beautiful kilims woven in blue, red and white patterns. The exotic Van cat, a protected specie, has thick white fur and one blue and one green eye. The philatelic sections of major Turkish post offices have beautiful Van Cat stamps.

At **Van Iskelesi (Van Harbor)**, friendly tea gardens and restaurants invite you for a break. **Edremit**, a holiday resort center 14 km to the southwest, has good beaches, swimming and camping. In the same direction is **Gevaş**, where you can visit a



Hoşap Castle, Van



**Nemrut Crater Lake,
Bitlis**

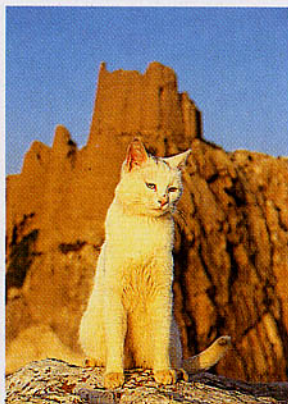
Seljuk cemetery with numerous decorated headstones, and the lovely Halime Hatun Mausoleum.

Lake Van, the largest lake in Turkey, is at an altitude of 1,720 meters, and is ringed by beautiful mountains. **Mount Süphan** (4,058 meters) is on the northwest side, and the **Ihtiyar Şahap Mountains** are to the south. You can circle the lake, visiting several

ancient Urartian sites as well as other places that represent the legacies of the various peoples who inhabited the area. Some of the islands in Lake Van have monasteries and churches built on them. No doubt the remote location offered seclusion to the resident religious communities. Forty-one kilometers southwest of Van, **Akdamar Island** (a half-hour sail from shore) is the most important of these. On the island stands a 10th-century church whose stone walls are richly carved with Old Testament scenes and figures. After sightseeing, swimmers and picnickers can enjoy themselves around the island's almond groves. If you have time, also visit **Çarpanak Island** to enjoy its landscape and to wander around the 12th-century church, which has now been converted into a museum.

Çavuştepe, 35 km from Van on the Hakkari road, is an important Urartian citadel. Excavated in 1970, today you can see temples, a palace, a sacrificial altar and inscriptions. On the pastoral, winding road to Hakkari, the **Zernek Dam Lake** offers itself as a resting spot on the way to **Hoşap**, 60 km from Van, where a 17th-century fairy tale castle rises above a small hill. Although the interior is badly damaged, the exterior walls, crenellations and turrets are well-preserved.

Among the interesting geographical features around Lake Van, the **Muradiye Waterfalls**, 88 km north of Van, with a



Van Cat

peaceful tea garden and restaurants, and **Gahnispi-Beyaz Çeşme Falls**, 60 km south of Van, are worth visiting.

The road to remote **Hakkari**, 203 km southeast of Van, takes you through some of Turkey's most magnificent scenery: the **Cilo-Sat Mountains** and the **Zap Valley**. A medieval fortress dominates the city, which is at an altitude of 1,748 meters.



Cilo Sat
Mountains,
Hakkari



Muradiye Waterfall, Van

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