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Talking Turkey: Cappadocia and Beyond

In this third installment of our four-part series, we highlight what's open beyond Istanbul throughout Turkey

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by Gretchen Kelly



*Ed Note: As international travel begins to recover, Business Traveler USA is exploring opportunities now available to US travelers in Morocco, Turkey, Egypt and beyond, with Kenn Laya, CEO of **Vuitton Travel**, (<https://vuittontravel.com>) a bespoke travel concierge service.*

In the second of this four-part series, (<https://www.businesstravelerusa.com/business-traveler-usa-story/talking-turkey-what-to-do-now-in-istanbul>) Kenn outlined a full roster of hotels open in Istanbul, detailed the best way to get to Turkey (Turkish Airlines), as well as rules for entering the country (PCR test, 48 hours ahead of time).

In Part Three he guides us through places to go and hotels that have reopened in other regions of Turkey.

BT: What are you recommending to your clients for exploring the huge variety of destinations to enjoy within Turkey?

Laya: I would say that if you have enough time to fully explore the country, spend a full week in Istanbul. But if you have more limited time, then spend a maximum of four nights in Istanbul and move from there on to Cappadocia, Konya, Izmir, Pammukale and Bodrun.

After four nights in Istanbul I would fly to Cappadocia on **Turkish Airlines.** (<http://www.turkishairlines.com/>) From Istanbul you fly to Kayseri. The city and airport is 35 miles away from your destination, Göreme, which is an open-air museum and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

I would spend at least two to three nights here. It is quite amazing – a landscape like an alien planet or the moon. I would do the Kaymakli Underground City, the Derinkuyu Underground City, Pasabag (Monks Valley), and the Caravanserais, which were ancient hotels for travelers on the Silk Road. You also must see this landscape of rock dwellings and mushroom fairy chimneys by hot air balloon, a must do in Cappadocia.

There is so much to do in this region: mountain trekking, jeep safaris, horseback riding, whirling dervishes, daily cooking classes and even belly dancing. I once sent a client here and she spent two weeks taking weaving lessons from local artisans. When she was free, she did sight-seeing in this uniquely beautiful region. She brought back all of the work she did with her. She said the trip was life changing.

BT: Where do you recommend travelers stay in the region?

Laya: One hotel I recommend is **argos in Cappadocia.** (<https://www.argosincappadocia.com/rooms-suites>) Most of the hotel is carved out of a cave and the views from here are breathtaking. Because it is a natural structure, no two rooms are going to be the same. There are splendid multi-level suites that have an indoor heated pool and a huge working fireplace.



I also recommend the **Museum Hotel** (<https://www.museumhotel.com.tr/en>) which is a Relais & Chateaux property. This is also a cave hotel. One of their top suites is the Sultan's Cave Suite which has its own window carved out of the cave's wall so you can see the valley below you. There is a huge whirlpool hot tub, sleeping and living area.

I don't recommend inexpensive hotels in Cappadocia. Save elsewhere, if you're on a tight budget but don't cut your budget in Cappadocia because you'll be missing out on an extraordinary experience.

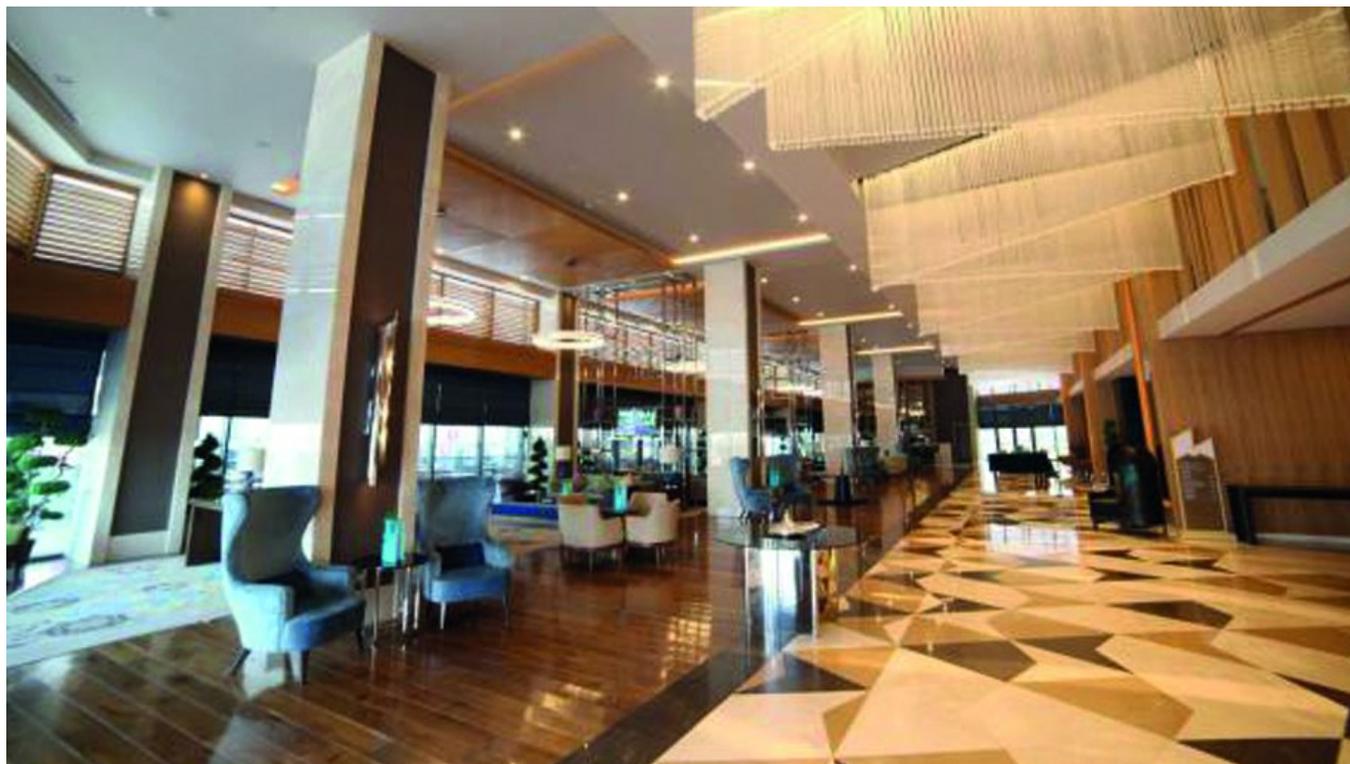
BT: Where do you recommend going after Cappadocia?

Laya: After Cappadocia I would head in a southwest direction for about 130 miles, to Konya. This town is perfect for anyone who is spiritually inclined, because it is the home of the Sufi poet, Rumi, whose work has been inspirational to modern audiences and was even recorded by Madonna.

Must do things in Konya include seeing the whirling dervishes (the dance is part of the Sufi ritual), Alladin Hill Park and Azizia Mosque. I would also not miss the Mevlâna Museum – this is the mausoleum of Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi. Read some of his remarkably accessible poems before you go.

The hotel I would recommend in Konya is **The Ramada Plaza,**

(<https://www.wyndhamhotels.com/ramada/konya-turkey/ramada-plaza-konya/overview> -) a high-standard property that is not fancy or high design but perfectly comfortable and well-situated.



Konya has an airport and from here I'd fly to Izmir for two or three nights. In this region you can visit the Roman ruins of Ephesus (46 minutes from Izmir); the stunning ruins of Pergamon (65 miles from Izmir) and Pamukkale (150 miles away – a short flight or a long drive).

Pamukkale is the place where you get those terraces of limestone with natural spa water you can soak in. It is as amazing as it looks in posters.

In this region, I recommend the **Swissotel Büyük Efes, Izmir**, (<https://all.accor.com/hotel/A5A6/index.en.shtml?dateIn=2020-11-12&nights=5&compositions=1&stayplus=false#origin=accor>) an Accor property.

BT: What other experiences would you add on for travelers with more time?

Laya: If I were there in late spring or early summer, nothing would prevent me from going to Bodrum on the Aegean or Turquoise Coast.

Bodrum is a jewel of a destination with equally stunning properties, some of which have recently been redesigned (like the **Aman Amanruya** (<https://www.aman.com/resorts/amanruya>) with its massive pool in the center of the

property). In Bodrum I also like the **Mandarin Oriental, Bodrum** (<http://www.mandarianoriental.com/bodrum/paradise-bay/luxury-hotel>) and Ian Schrager's **EDITION** (https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/bjveb-the-bodrum-edition/?scid=bb1a189a-fec3-4d19-a255-54ba596febe2&y_source=1_OTc3NjU4NS03MTUtG9jYXRpb24uZ29vZ2xlX3dlYnNpdGVfb3ZlBodrum). The EDITION has just announced that it is doing lockdown Zen Retreats with a health focus where you can do yoga and other therapeutics like flower essence treatments. It is also spotlessly clean and beautifully designed.



For the adventurous who want luxury alongside their outward bound experiences, I would hire a gulet, a two-masted wooden sailing vessel. I book them for my clients and send them on a seven-day journey around the Turquoise Coast. It is all stunning scenery with jagged rocks, lots of coves and tiny coastal towns that are great for visiting on lazy afternoons. Your staff cooks and takes care of you (those great Turkish breakfasts on board!) and it is the nearest thing to heaven I can think of.

Outside of Bodrum, for lovers of ruins and ancient history, a visit to Göbekli Tepe, which predates Stonehenge by 6,000 years, is a must. Here you'll find the world's first temple and Antakaya, a site containing 3,500 artifacts from 13 civilizations. **The Museum Hotel** (<http://http%3A/www.themuseumhotelantakya.com/>) is still awaiting post-COVID reopening. It's an independent property – not to be confused with the

Museum Hotel in Cappadocia – built over the archeological site which you can see below its glass floor. Well worth the wait, when it opens.

Altogether, everything about Turkey is warm, welcoming and very sincere. It is an incredible destination and the fact that so much is open and available now and under very strict health and safety measures makes it first on the list for many US travelers who want to travel internationally again.

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