

Selling The Richness Of Turkey

BY RONEN PALDI

This year ASTA is holding its International Destination Expo, April 19-22, in Istanbul, exposing travel agents to the richness of travel in a country that is nearly as varied as its landscape. I'll be there to help educate agents on how to better sell travel to Turkey and its many regions. But here's a quick summary of what you should know about this beautiful and fascinating country.

Turkey's legacy of the Roman and Ottoman empires includes exquisite palaces, churches and mosques. Its cities brim with personality, exotic cuisine and ancient treasure. Istanbul alone is worth the trip, but there is so much more to see as well as something for everyone. Building trips around client interests can introduce new travelers to Turkey – and those trips can be easily built around four areas: architecture tours, faith or pilgrimage tours, culinary programs, shopping tours, agricultural tourism and soft adventure.

Architecture: Istanbul has the famed Blue Mosque, so named for its interior walls with 20,000 blue tiles. There is also the lesser known but equally impressive Topkapi Palace, home to the Ottoman sultans for 400 years. Also in Istanbul is Hagia Sophia, a former church and mosque that is now a museum. The building was built in a short five years, from 532 to 537 A.D., and is on par with the grandeur of St. Paul's in London, but built 1,000 years earlier. Dedicated architecture buffs also will want to get to Gaziantep to see the recently rediscovered mosaics on display there and visit Trabzon in the north along the Black Sea. Trabzon is on the famous Silk Road and home to its own Hagia Sophia, a stunning Byzantine church.

Faith or Pilgrimage Tours: Some of the New Testament took place in and has references throughout to the places and people of Turkey. Hitting all the highlights can easily take two weeks, but shorter visits should include the Cappadocia region in central Turkey, which is referred to in the Book of Acts and contains vast underground cities that housed thousands of people. Another popular pilgrimage is the seaside town of Ephesus and the Greek island of Patmos, the site of St. John's imprisonment around 95 A.D., where you can visit the Cave of the Apocalypse. A pilgrimage touring six of the Seven Churches of the Revelation would involve visits to Pergamon, Laodicea, Sardis, Philadelphia and Izmir. Your clients can learn about the Hittite people, referred to in the Old Testament at the Hittite Museum in Ankara, and tour Iznik, formerly called Nicea, where the Council of Nicea was first called by Constantine in 325 A.D. Longer trips can include visits to Adana and to the ancient Cave Church in Antioch, as well as tours of Tarsus, where the Apostle Paul was born. Pilgrimage or other religious-centered travel groups are easy to form and can provide a big revenue stream for your agency.

Culinary: Turkish cuisine is one of the founding cuisines in the world, and with so many waterfronts the seafood is plentiful. There is great variety in Ottoman food the traditional meat kabobs are unlike American versions and enjoying Turkish coffee or tea is an event in itself. Be prepared for mezzas (appetizers) to arrive prior to ordering in a restaurant. When in Istanbul, tell your clients to visit the Spice Market for saffron, Turkish Delight and other nearly overwhelming sensory delights.

Shopping: Shopping is great year-round, but early November is the low season in Turkey so there are plenty of bargains to be had on both shopping and travel expenses. A shopping week in Istanbul should include time at the Grand Bazaar, the largest market on the planet, with 11 gates, 58 streets and 6,000 shopping stalls offering jewelry, carpets, leather and ceramics. A side trip to the Cappadocia region is worth the journey to shop for silk rugs.

Agricultural: Agricultural tours can include inland and coastal growing regions. The Western coast has significant olive growing regions and Turkey is the top producer of hazelnuts in the world. Significant crops also include cereals, cotton, sugar beets and grapes. Most of the farming lands are in the areas of Izmir, Konya and Adana. Some of the finest Turkish tobacco is grown around the city of Samsun, which is in the north along the Black Sea.

Soft Adventure: There are a wide variety of outdoor adventures in Turkey around which to build a trip. Popular adventures include ballooning, rafting, climbing, skiing, scuba and skydiving.

In searching the publicly accessible web, we found a webpage of interest and provide a snapshot of itAgent@Home Magazine Page 1 of 2
<http://www.agentathome.com/PrintEditorial.aspx?n=67690> 2/19/2010 below. Please be advised that this page, and any images or links in it, may have changed since we created this snapshot. For your convenience, we provide a hyperlink to the current webpage as part of our service. If you are a list maker, make note of these key sites for the novice and experienced traveler to Turkey. The top five sites that a first-time visitor to Turkey should see are the Blue Mosque, Istanbul; the Hagia Sophia, Istanbul; the Grand Bazaar, Istanbul; the archeological ruins at Ephesus; and the ancient city of Pergamon

The top five sites a repeat visitor to Turkey should see include the Cappadocia region in central Turkey to visit the underground cities and the fairy chimneys; Konya, the home of the Sufi movement and the Whirling Dervishes; Bodrum, a seaside resort, where the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, is located; Gaziantep in central Turkey for the magnificent display of mosaics; and the Black Sea region, an under-visited area of Turkey.

Here are a few more facts about Turkey that you can use when selling the country to your clients. Turkey is 1,056 miles wide and would take several days to cross by road, but that can be accomplished in a few hours' flight. There are four main regions. First, of course, there is Istanbul, the only city to occupy two continents and home to 17 million people. The city also just happens to be the 2010 European Capital of Culture. Second, there's Western Turkey, known for its archeological riches and popular cruise line stops, such as Ephesus and Kusadasi (the town of Iznik is the largest in the region). Third, there is Cappadocia Region in Central Turkey, known for its Christian history, its moon-like appearance and its underground cities, the largest of which is Derinkuyu Underground City, which occupies eight floors. And finally there is the southern resort region of Turkey along the coast, a popular getaway for Europeans known as the Antalya Riviera.

No matter where your clients' interests lie, Turkey has something to offer. From ancient ruins to sun drenched coasts, the country's wealth of history, stunning examples of architecture and unequalled cuisine make it a must visit for any traveler.

Ronen Paldi, founder of Ya'lla Tours USA, offers tours to Turkey, Greece, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and Israel. Ya'lla is also the only wholesale tour company licensed by the U.S. Treasury to operate legal travel to Cuba.

For more information, visit www.yallatours.com