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With the city being very big and being what it is, the value of having a guide and agenda during a vacation is of the utmost importance. With the city's size, it is not a destination to just walk outside your hotel and stroll to get to all the major sites. You need to have a plan in place and a guide who will be able to navigate through traffic and provide a personalized agenda to ensure an exceptional experience. Aida's guides throughout the country are knowledgeable, personable, adaptable and many are fluent in multiple languages. Our traveler advisors from Mexico were enthusiastic to have guides that speak both English and Spanish for their clients.

Islam is the largest religion in Turkey. This makes sense as to why there are over 3,269 mosques in Istanbul. While many residents are Islam, the number of strict practicing Muslims is not as great here as in some other Islamic cultures. With this information, it should be noted that travel to Istanbul during Ramadan (the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic calendar) is a good time for visiting Istanbul, as crowds are not as big, and businesses will still be open.

Our DMC in Turkey is Aida Tailor Made Travelling. Aida designs the bespoke experiences that help guests fully immerse into the local culture of celebrating life by crafting memorable experiences that showcase the very best throughout Turkey.

From November 10-13, 2022, I escorted 11 travel advisors from the United States and Mexico to attend the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of LIT (LuxinTurkiye) created by Aida and held in Istanbul. With 120 advisors attending from around the world, this was the first year they had this many advisors representing North America. The advisors were hosted in luxury hotels throughout the city with evening events held at Six Senses Kocatas Mansions and Four Seasons at the Bosphorus. The days were filled with a workshop of meeting hoteliers from around the country, a Bosphorus boat tour and a city tour with a special lunch at AJWA Sultanahmet. On the final evening a black-tie gala was held at the Shangri-La Bosphorus which included a celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Aida.

The North American advisors extended their trip with a post-FAM to Cappadocia to see the exceptional natural wonders and experience the sunrise hot air balloon ride. Cappadocia is a region in Central Anatolia, Turkey. The best way to get to Cappadocia is a one-hour flight from Istanbul. It is then an hour transfer to the tourism region. Here there are a range of hotels and price points for travelers with some options including cave rooms. We stayed at the new AJWA Cappadocia with traditional Anatolian hospitality with room categories ranging from traditional hotel rooms to villas and a cave that can be enjoyed by guests of all ages, including families. The 90-acre property has something for everyone, with a standout being the Zeferan Restaurant that has a "living kitchen" concept. We had a fabulous dinner here that was not only delicious, but entertaining as their concept is based on the idea that "every dish has a story" ensuring all guests are a part of the kitchen experience that introduces you to the rich and sweet culture of Azerbaijan.

Another hotel we visited in this region was Argos (Virtuoso, Signature, Traveller Made). This property has 51 rooms along with two dining options and is located in a village with stunning views from the cascading structure of the property.

When exploring the region, Cappadocia is a place for those that love the outdoors and history. There are a range of cave towns to visit including Goreme town/Goreme open air museum, Guzelyurt's Selime Monastery, Kaymakli Underground City and the fairy chimneys to name a few.

We had an unexpectedly fun and educational visit to Kaodokya Seramik, a family-owned business that creates beautifully handmade and hand-painted ceramics of an ancient Turkish art passed down through the generations. It takes months for each piece to be made. We saw how the potter creates the art and then the extensive process for preserving and hand painting each piece. These works of art are a truly special souvenir to bring back to remember your journey by.

And of course, we must not leave out the most important experience in Cappadocia, the sunrise hot air balloon rides. While hot air balloon excursions exist around the world, there is nothing that even comes close to comparing the views and experience you have here. It is recommended that travelers spend at least 3 nights in Cappadocia, as hot air balloon rides are only able to happen in favorable weather conditions. With having at least 3 nights, in case one day weather is not good, you can reschedule for the next day. Thankfully, we had the most perfect conditions on the day of our ride. This is also experienced where you must rise early. You need to be there about an hour before the sunrise, which can be close to 4am in the summer. On our November visit, we met at 6:30am. Our transfer picked us up at the hotel, dropped us off at the balloon and the balloon team had the rest of the process down to a science. Our balloon held about 16 people comfortably, with the pilot being in an area in the middle. He did a great job explaining the process, provided Wi-Fi, 360-degree photography that could be purchased after and fun facts throughout the one-hour journey. Our ride was very smooth as we went up and down and got to see all of the different balloons doing the same around us. Halfway through we saw the perfect sunrise above the mountains. Now onto the landing, which we had no idea how that would go down, but the pilot was in touch with his team who followed our path and pulled up their flatbed truck to a spot in which we effortlessly landed on. They then helped us out of the basket to an area where they had a table set up with mimosas, chocolate covered strawberries, and a medal for each participant. The morning was an angelic experience that will always be remembered.

A huge thank you to AIDA for arranging and hosting an educational and memorable trip for the North American advisors. If you have any questions about Turkey, what type of client would enjoy the destination, or would like to learn more about the different regions within, always feel free to reach out to the WanderLuxe team and we will connect you with the experts at Aida.