

SYRIAN ACTIVISM IN TURKEY MARCH 2017



Tour Date:

18. March 2017 to 25. March 2017

Turkey is the country that has witnessed the largest influx of refugees from Syria. Today it has become a temporary home for about 3 million Syrians who fled their homeland in order to escape either Bashar Al Assad's brutal and deadly breakdown on large parts of the country or Islamic militias who profited from the reluctance to fight them.

A relatively safe haven for Syrians

Southern Turkey which borders Syria has hence become the first relatively safe haven for refugees on their way out of the country. Many had wanted or still want to move on to Europe and settled temporarily, others prefer to watch the unfolding events in Syria from close-by, awaiting the possibility of their return. Turkish cities such as Gaziantep, Antakya or Kilis have become centers of Syrian life in the diaspora. Gaziantep with its hundreds of thousands of Syrian inhabitants is nowadays nicknamed "little Aleppo", Syrian food and products are omnipresent in the city.

Syrians in Southern Turkey are facing many challenges to which they react in different and multiple ways: while some are engaged in the support of their relatives, friends and fellow Syrians in Syria, others have created a large network of support and aid for the Syrian community in Turkey. With one eye always turned towards Syria, Syrians in Turkey have managed to create a vivid and pluralist civil society which keeps the memory of Syria and the vision of a return alive through various educational, political, social and religious activities. It is here that political alternatives to Bashar Al Assad's regime are envisioned and developed and where the opposition and peaceful resistance movements take shape. During our trip we will meet several of these protagonists of change.

Meeting Syrian protagonists of change

Our trip aims at providing participants with a first hand insight into the multiple and diverse actors and activities of the Syrian diaspora community in Turkey. During our stay, we will pay visits to the main centers of Syrian life in the Turkish South, meeting and engaging with the different Syrian communities in these cities. Through lectures, political tours and discussions we will learn about their work in Turkey, be it aimed at supporting civil society in Syria itself or at building and creating a civil society in Turkey. We will learn about the role women play in this process of community building and meet International, Turkish and Syrian NGOs that work in the cities to provide humanitarian aid to the refugees.

Focus Areas of our Program

We will start our trip in Gaziantep, the city that has become the diaspora capital of activism and resistance against Bashar al Assad's dictatorship. Briefings about the situation in Syria and meetings with Syrian civil society organizations will shape the stay in the city. Being based in Gaziantep, we will visit Kilis for a day trip: Kilis is the only Turkish city with more Syrian than Turkish citizens inhabiting the place. Due to its location next to the Turkish-Syrian border Kilis has been an entry point for millions of refugees. At the same time the city has been vital for bringing in humanitarian aid to Aleppo Province. In Kilis we will focus on the humanitarian situation in Syria, the situation of refugees in Turkey and the effects of the war in Syria on border areas. Further, we will spend two days in Şanlıurfa with its marvellous old city. Due to its proximity to "ISIS"-controlled areas, it was here that Syrian citizen journalists started to report about the atrocities committed by the Islamist terror organization. We will meet courageous activists that stood up both against Assad's and the "ISIS"-terror regime. Our journey will end in Antakya, one of Turkey's most ethnically and religiously diverse cities. In Antakya region that was only ceded from Syria to Turkey in 1939, we will focus on matters of religious coexistence and the population's historical sense of belonging.

The trip will be organized by Alsharq in cooperation with AlHakam Shaar, a scholar from Aleppo. He has spent several years in Turkey and has first hand contacts and networks in the Syrian community in Turkey. He is now based at the Central European University of Budapest, working as a researcher for the "Aleppo Project" which works on a future reconstruction of Aleppo by means of archiving its heritage, mapping the city's rich history and envisioning an after-war perspective for the urban center that Aleppo once was and will hopefully be again.

Encounters and discussions are going to be dominant features of this educational trip. If you are interested in the many touristic attractions in Southeast Turkey, we advise you to extend your stay in Turkey for a few more days.

The trip might be of special interest for journalists and people who are working with Syrian refugees and/or civil society activists.

Price

Tour Price

1.489 €

Tour Price

Reduced Price

989 €

Reduced Price



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Tour Overview

START: Gaziantep

FINISH: Antakya

DURATION: 8 Days, 7 Nights

TRANSPORT: Private Bus, Public Transport where possible

ACCOMMODATION: Guesthouses, Mid-Range Hotels

SINGLE ROOM SUPPLEMENT: 400 €

TOUR LANGUAGE: English

Travel itinerary and program

Tour program:

Day 1: Gaziantep

- Introduction to Itinerary
- Characterization of Gaziantep
- Visit to Old City and the Souq
- Discussion with Activist who witnessed all stages of the Syrian Revolution

Day 2: Gaziantep

- Briefing on current situation in Syria by representatives of the Orient Policy Center
- Discussion on Media Activism with Syrian activist
- Dinner in a Syrian Open Air Restaurant

Day 3: Gaziantep

- Discussion with member of the NGO *Kesh Malek* on educational activities in the liberated areas
- Meeting with representatives of the oppositional *Damascus Declaration*
- Dinner discussion with activists on local committee work in Syria at Gaziantep's most famous Restaurant

Day 4: Kilis

- Talks with people living in the border town and the nearby refugee camp
- Meeting with UNHCR or other group working with refugees

Day 5: Gaziantep

- Meeting with the *Syrian Economic Forum* on empowering the business ecosystem during the Syrian transition period
- Discussion with Activists about *grassroot journalism*
- Talk with female activists on chances, changes and challenges the revolution has brought for women in Syria and Turkey

Day 6: Sanliurfa

- Meetings with activists who lived under ISIS and regime rule
- Time to shop in the beautiful Souq of Urfa

Day 7: Antakya

- Historical introduction to the region, the special case of Hatay/Iskandarun and recent ties between the border areas in Turkey and Syria
- Visit of farm that supports food sovereignty projects in Syria

Day 8: Reyhanli / Antakya

- A region of diversity: Introduction to the different religious and ethnic groups living in Hatay province
- Meeting with an independent doctors' association: Self-organization in the medical field and the impact of injured people on society
- Skype talk with people living on the other side of the border in Idlib province: The problematic of closed borders
- Evaluation of trip
- Departure



Gaziantep

Turkey's sixth largest city was considered a "satellite town" of Aleppo during Ottoman times. It historically had a mainly Turkish speaking population with a significant Armenian community, but today it is dubbed "Little Aleppo" by some of its inhabitants. Since the start of the revolution and the ensuing persecution and bombing campaigns, Gaziantep has become home for about half a million Syrian expats and refugees who have turned the city into a launchpad for civil society initiatives and advocacy groups, as well as a hub for international organizations looking for ways to support and influence engagement with Syria.

Antakya

An important centre for early Christianity, Antioch - or Antakya - is one of Turkey's most ethnically and religiously diverse cities. Having only been ceded to Turkey from Syria by the French occupation in 1939, the city retained significant Arabic and Armenian speaking minorities of different faiths: Muslim Sunnis, Alawites, and Alevis, as well as Christian Orthodox. Together with the city of Reyhanli in the same province of Hatay, Antakya now hosts an additional 400 thousand Arabic speakers: Syrians who have fled the war and keep a lifeline with Syria through NGOs and other actors.

Şanlıurfa

With charming souqs, the famous pools (Balikligöl) and Abraham's Mosque, Urfa was one of the vital centres for Syriac and Armenian Orthodox Christians who lived alongside Jews and Muslim Kurds, Arabs and Turks well into the beginning of the 20th century. With strong geographic and demographic connections to the Syrian Jazeera region, Urfa today hosts hundreds of thousands of Kurdish and Arab Syrians under temporary protection status. Though detached from the INGO buzz of Gaziantep, it was the place from which activists and citizen journalists from groups such as "Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently" were spreading the word about the atrocities committed by ISIS, and before that by the Syrian Regime.

Kilis

The third smallest of Turkey's 81 provinces by population, Kilis is the only city with the official numbers of Syrian refugees exceeding those of the native Turkish citizens. The city is only a 15 minute drive from the closest border crossing with Aleppo Province, and is vital for delivering aid into Syria as well as for the millions who have had to pass through it for their safety. In Kilis we will focus on the humanitarian situation in Syrian and on the situation of refugees in Turkey.

Tour Team



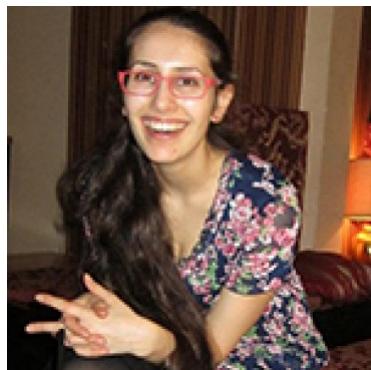
Amina Nolte

I am a PhD student in the field of Sociology, working on urban development and political participation in Jerusalem. Being a member of Alsharq for the last seven years, I have organized and guided many Alsharq-trips to the region, including Israel and Palestine, Jordan, Iran, Morocco and Iraqi-Kurdistan. In 2010 I studied Arabic in Damascus and ever since I feel very much connected to the country and its people. I am thus very much looking forward to be part of this trip to the Syrian communities in Turkey, together with Ansar and Hakam, whom I have known for a long time and whom I am excited to travel with on this tour.



AlHakam Shaar

AlHakam Shaar is a scholar from Aleppo. He has spent several years in Turkey and has first hand contacts and networks in the Syrian community in Turkey. He is now based at the Central European University of Budapest, working as a researcher for the "Aleppo Project" which works on a future reconstruction of Aleppo by means of archiving its heritage, mapping the city's rich history and envisioning an after-war perspective for the urban center that Aleppo once was and will hopefully be again.



Ansar Jasim

Ansar Jasim has lived in Syria before the uprising in 2011 started. Since then she has worked with Syrian and international activists to support the young and nascent Syrian civil society. During her two years stay in Lebanon she worked with the Syrian communities there and got deep insights into the self-organizing capacity of the refugee community. She has studied Political Science and Middle Eastern Studies in Marburg and London. Her special interest lies in the topic of food sovereignty during times of war and after.

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