Abraham Path

DISCOVER THE IBRAHIM YOLU

Along the Abraham Path



Credit: Hannah Stork

FAST FACTS

Ibrahim Yolu, Abraham's Path in Turkish, traces the legendary first steps of Abraham, linking ancient history with living cultures across the semi-arid landscapes of southeastern Türkiye.


Credit: Ömer Tanık

From 2007–2012, API invested $250,000 to map and waymark 170 km of trail, establish homestays in Kurdish and Arab communities, and train local guides, creating a pathway where heritage and hospitality meet.


Credit: Elish Sari

The route is located in Şanlıurfa Province in southeastern Türkiye and spans Şanlıurfa, Harran, the archaeological site of Göbekli Tepe, welcoming homestay communities, and wide semi-arid steppes.

The region's demographic landscape includes Kurdish, Arab, and Turkish communities, each with distinct languages, traditions, and cultural practices. In recent years, Syrian refugees have also settled in the area, bringing their own dialects and customs.

Visitors should approach this diversity with respect and curiosity, and engage thoughtfully with local customs, traditions, and marketplaces, and appreciating the region's architectural and cultural variety.

Location

Southeastern Türkiye, bordering Syria to the south and the Turkish provinces of Gaziantep, Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, and Mardin.

Population

~2.4 million residents, with 50% under the age of 25.

Languages Spoken

Turkish, Kurdish (Kurmanji), and Arabic. Additional languages may be spoken within local communities.

Currency

Turkish Lira (TL).

Hospitality

Hospitality is central to daily life in southeastern Türkiye, and in Şanlıurfa it is particularly evident in the warmth extended to visitors. Guests are often offered tea, coffee, sweets, or small snacks, and it is customary to accept at least a small portion as a sign of appreciation. Bringing a small gift like tea, sugar, or Turkish coffee (an item hosts cannot produce themselves), is a thoughtful way to thank hosts.

Meals are typically communal and unfold at a slower rhythm, often accompanied by conversation. Travelers are expected to show patience and courtesy, accepting the pauses and unhurried pace as part of the experience. When entering a home, shoes are typically removed and standing to greet elders or prominent family members is a sign of respect.



Credit: David Landis

DO


Credit: David Landis

- Accept refreshments when offered, even if only a small portion, to show appreciation.
- Be patient during meals and allow conversations and pauses to flow naturally.
- Remove your shoes before entering someone's home.
- Stand or offer a polite gesture when greeting elders or key family members.

DON'T


Credit: David Landis

- Decline hospitality abruptly; if necessary, do so politely and gently.
- Rush through conversations or show impatience with the slower pace.
- Ignore customary greetings, such as standing to welcome elders or removing shoes before entering a home.

Meals & Food


Credit: Stefan Szepsi

Meals in Şanlıurfa often feature meats, legumes, and vegetables, seasoned with locally grown spices like Urfa pepper. Pork is not consumed and alcohol is not generally served, though some households may offer it. To avoid insulting or offending a host, do not request pork or alcohol.

Dining is a communal experience with meals typically served on the floor atop a clean cloth. In villages, community members may eat with their hands but visitors can request a spoon or fork.

It is customary to finish all food offered, as leaving leftovers may be viewed as wasteful. Desserts are often served at the end of the meal.

DO

- Accept food and drink offered by hosts, even if only a small portion.
- Finish the food served to show respect for the host and local customs.
- Observe communal dining practices, such as eating on the floor or sharing and passing dishes.

DON'T

- Refuse food abruptly or without courtesy.
- Request food or drink that is not commonly consumed, like pork or alcohol.
- Waste food by leaving large amounts uneaten.


Credit: Elish Sari


Credit: Stefan Szepsi

Religious & Cultural Sensitivities


Credit: David Landis


Credit:Hannah Stork

Şanlıurfa, often called the "City of Prophets," holds deep religious and cultural significance, particularly within the Abrahamic faiths. Visitors should be mindful of local customs when visiting sacred sites, following public guidelines and maintaining a respectful and reverent demeanor.

The Islamic call to prayer occurs five times a day, and during Ramadan and Eid most businesses and services may be closed. During Ramadan, it is considered inappropriate to eat or drink in public. In religious settings, women should cover their arms, legs, and hair, while men should wear clothing that covers below the knee.

Interactions between genders are often reserved, and public displays of affection are discouraged. Travelers should approach social situations with sensitivity, humility, and respect, ensuring their behavior aligns with local norms and fosters positive cultural engagement.

DO

- Show respect at religious sites by following public guidelines and maintaining a quiet, reverent demeanor.
- Dress modestly and appropriately when visiting sacred or culturally significant locations.
- Approach social interactions with humility, patience, and openness to local customs.
- Observe and follow local norms regarding gender interactions and public behavior.

DON'T

- Enter religious sites without adhering to the rules or behaving respectfully.
- Display public affection in ways that could be considered inappropriate.
- Assume all social interactions are casual; disregard for local customs can be offensive.
- Ignore signs of gendered etiquette or community protocols in social settings.

Gender Norms

Gender roles are shaped by traditional and conservative values. In rural areas, women may have a more limited public presence, interactions between men and women who are not related to one another are often reserved. Public spaces and social gatherings can reflect this separation, with men and women occupying different areas, and elders or male family members often taking precedence in decision-making.



Physical contact between genders, such as handshakes, may be avoided by community members. Visitors should refrain from initiating contact with the opposite sex; one can place their hand over their heart as a sign of respect.

Women are expected to dress modestly, covering shoulders and legs, particularly in markets, rural areas, and religious sites. When seated, modest posture is also expected; avoid overly relaxed positions or gestures that may be viewed as disrespectful. Travelers should be mindful of seating arrangements, gestures, and topics of conversation, avoiding behavior that could be considered forward or intrusive.

DO

- Follow the lead of community members regarding greetings and physical contact across genders.
- Dress modestly, covering shoulders and legs, particularly in markets, rural areas, and religious sites.
- Be attentive to seating arrangements, gestures, and conversational norms.

DON'T

- Initiate physical contact with members of the opposite gender without clear consent.
- Wear revealing or tight-fitting clothing in public, rural, or religious spaces.
- Engage in behavior that might be considered forward, intrusive, or disrespectful.
- Ignore traditional gendered separation in public spaces or social gatherings.

Communication & Body Language

Communication blends verbal and non-verbal cues, shaped by local culture, religion, and social hierarchies. Turkish is the official language, though many residents also speak Kurdish (mainly Kurmanji) and/or Arabic, reflecting the region's diverse ethnic and linguistic heritage. Politeness and formality are highly valued, with honorifics and formal forms of address expected when speaking with elders or in professional settings.

Non-verbal communication is equally important. Handshakes are customary among men, while women may greet each other with a light kiss on the cheeks or a handshake depending on context. Physical contact between genders may be avoided by community members, and visitors should follow the social norms of the situation.

DO

- Use honorifics and formal forms of address when speaking with elders or in professional settings.
- Follow local cues for greetings: handshakes among men, light cheek kisses or handshakes for women, or placing your right hand over your heart with a slight bow if physical contact is avoided.
- Be mindful of body language, showing respect to elders and authority figures.
- Pay attention to verbal and non-verbal cues to navigate social interactions respectfully.


Credit: Jodi HIlton

DON'T

- Assume all community members speak only Turkish; disregarding other languages can be seen as disrespectful.
- Stand with hands on hips or in pockets when addressing elders.
- Initiate physical contact across genders if community members avoid it.
- Ignore formalities or polite forms of address.


Credit: Jodi HIlton

Dress & Appearance

Visitors should dress modestly, especially in rural areas, markets, and religious sites.

Women are advised to cover their shoulders, arms, and legs, wearing knee-length dresses, long skirts, or pants, and to carry a light scarf for covering the head when entering mosques or traditional homes.

Men should avoid sleeveless shirts or shorts outside tourist-focused areas.

Revealing clothing can attract unwanted attention and may be considered disrespectful.

Do

- Dress modestly, covering shoulders, arms, and legs, especially in rural areas, markets, and religious sites.
- Women should carry a light scarf for head covering when entering mosques or traditional homes.
- Choose clothing that is loose-fitting and unobtrusive to avoid drawing unwanted attention.

Don't

- Wear sleeveless shirts or shorts outside tourist-focused areas.
- Wear tight or revealing clothing that may be considered disrespectful.
- Ignore local customs around head covering, especially in religious or traditional spaces.
- Assume that casual tourist attire is acceptable in all settings.

Transportation



Taxis are usually the easiest way for visitors to get around. Make sure to agree on the fare or confirm that the meter will be used. Local buses operate on fixed routes, but most signs and announcements are in Turkish. People are generally willing to help if you ask. It's helpful to have your destination written in Turkish or saved on your phone.

Ride-sharing services like Uber or Lyft are not common, and hitchhiking is not recommended for safety reasons. For longer trips, consider arranging transport through your hotel or a trusted local service, especially if you're unfamiliar with the area.

Do

- Use taxis for convenience, and agree on the fare or ensure the meter is running.
- Ask community members for directions or guidance.
- Carry a card or note with key phrases or your destination written in Turkish.

Don't

- Rely on ride-sharing apps like Uber or Lyft or hitchhike.
- Ignore local traffic rules or safety precautions.



Privacy & Personal Space

Respect for privacy is an important part of daily life in Şanlıurfa. Personal space is highly valued, especially in rural areas, and visitors should always seek informed consent before taking photos or videos. When requesting permission, explain how the image or footage may be used and where it might appear. If the subject is a child, consent must be obtained from a parent or guardian.

Public photography of religious ceremonies, private homes, or domestic activities without permission is discouraged. When photographing or observing local life, take time to notice the social context and norms of the setting. Being attentive to body language, gestures, and the comfort of those around you ensures interactions remain respectful and culturally appropriate.

DO

- Respect personal space.
- Ask for informed consent before photographing or filming individuals.
- Be mindful of local norms around privacy in both homes and public spaces.

DON'T

- Photograph or film people, homes, or ceremonies without consent.
- Enter private areas or gatherings uninvited.
- Ignore the separation of public and private spaces in traditional homes.
- Assume that being in a public street or market permits unrestricted photography or intrusion.



Environment

Şanlıurfa Province experiences long, dry summers and short, wetter winters. Despite human impact, the region remains ecologically rich with over a thousand plant species, hundreds of bird species, and rare animals such as the striped hyena and desert monitor. Wildlife sightings are rare, but domestic animals are common. The area also contains numerous natural and historical sites integral to Şanlıurfa's cultural heritage.

Hiring a local guide is recommended for all Abraham Path experiences, especially in Türkiye, where some sections are unmarked and land use changes over time. Guides provide detailed knowledge of the terrain, cultural and environmental insights, and directly support the local economy.

Visitors should be mindful of water use and local sanitation, disposing of toilet paper or wipes in trash bins rather than flushing.

DO

- Hire a local guide.
- Respect natural habitats and wildlife.
- Appreciate and preserve historical and cultural sites.
- Follow Leave No Trace principles.
- Learn about local ecosystems and agricultural practices to understand the region's heritage.

DON'T

- Disturb wildlife or damage plant life in natural areas.
- Litter or leave waste in natural or cultural sites.
- Damage or remove artifacts or historical features.
- Ignore signs or rules in protected or culturally significant areas.



Credit: Izzet Aran

Visitors are encouraged to follow **Leave No Trace** principles, including:



Emergencies & Health

For basic health needs, visiting a hospital for illness or injury is common. Bring any necessary prescriptions with you; while some medications can be obtained at pharmacies without a prescription, it is safer to have your regular medications on hand. Pharmacies (*eczane*) are widely available in urban areas, marked by a red "E" sign, and pharmacists can provide basic guidance.

Travelers are advised to call 112 first, as this number connects to the national coordination system, which directs the call to the relevant service. Operators may or may not speak English; having a local contact or phrase card in Turkish can be helpful.

Emergency Numbers

- 112 – General Emergency *(operators dispatch to relevant ambulance, fire, police, and gendarmerie unit)*
- 110 – Fire Department *(also accessible through 112)*
- 155 – Police *(also accessible through 112 | responsible for urban areas)*
- 156 – Gendarmerie *(also accessible through 112 | responsible for areas outside of police force jurisdiction, usually rural areas)*



Do

- Carry any necessary prescriptions and essential medications with you.
- Call 112 first for any emergency, as it connects to the national coordination system.
- Have a local contact or Turkish phrase card handy in case operators do not speak English.

Don't

- Expect to find personal medication readily available.
- Rely on informal or unlicensed healthcare providers.
- Assume all emergency numbers will be English-speaking; prepare accordingly.

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