

THE LOST EDEN

IRAQI KURDISTAN

9 days

Discover a hidden gem of the Middle East — a land of dramatic mountains, ancient cultures, and resilient people.

Iraqi Kurdistan is an autonomous region in northern Iraq known for its safety, diversity, and breathtaking nature. It has its own government and military, and is home to Kurds, Arabs, Yazidis, Assyrians, and other minorities. Locals are friendly and respectful towards visitors.

Dress code: Women are not required to cover their heads (except at religious sites like Lalish).

Currency: Iraqi Dinar (IQD). Bring small denominations in cash. Bank cards are accepted in major cities, but cash is essential for most places, especially in rural areas.

SIM Cards: Available at airports and city shops (Zain, Korek, Asiacell), besides that e-SIM for this region are available.

Time Zone: GMT+3

Visa: E-visa available for many nationalities (including citizens of EU, US, Canada and etc.)

Best Time to Visit: Spring and fall offer mild weather and blooming nature.

Arrival Day

Welcome to Kurdistan. Depending on your arrival time, we will greet you in Erbil, the beating heart of the region. After checking into our hotel, the evening is yours to rest and prepare for the adventure ahead.

Overnight in Erbil

Day 1

Exploring Erbil

Our journey begins in the city of contrasts, where ancient history blends with modern life. We start with the breathtaking **Jalil Khayat Mosque**, its domes and mosaics echoing Ottoman and Andalusian styles.

From there, we climb into time itself: the **Erbil Citadel**, a fortress that has watched over humanity for more than 7,000 years. Within its walls, we'll step into the **Textile & Heritage Museum**, where Kurdish craftsmanship tells centuries of stories.

Descending into the lively **Qaysari Bazaar**, we'll wander among spices, copperware, and fabrics, before pausing at the historic **Choli Minaret**. As the day softens, we drive to **Khanzad Castle**, where sunset paints the landscape golden. Dinner will be in a local restaurant, rich with Kurdish flavors.

Overnight in Erbil

Day 2

Koya & Slemani

At sunrise, we depart Erbil, driving toward **Koya**, where the old caravanserai still whispers of merchants and caravans. Higher in the mountains, we pause for tea at **Klka Smaqa**, overlooking the serene **Lake Dukan**.

By midday, we reach **Sulaymaniyah**. Here, the walls of the **Amnasuraka War Museum** tell the painful truths of Saddam Hussein's regime and the Anfal campaign—a sobering reminder of resilience.

We continue to the city's beating heart: the **Slemani Bazaar**, the **Grand Mosque**, and the **Saray**, where the echoes of the British Empire and the

first Kurdish kingdom linger. As evening falls, we ascend Goizha Mountain, watching the city flicker to life beneath us. The day closes with a traditional Kurdish dinner.

Overnight in Sulaymaniyah

Day 3

Slemanî to Rawandîz

We begin at the **Slemanî Archaeological Museum**, then head toward **Qyzqapan Cave**, the ancient tomb of a Median king. Deeper in the mountains lies **Jasana Cave**, tied to the story of Sheikh Mahmud Barznji, the first Kurdish king under British rule.

By the shimmering **Lake Dukan**, we pause for tea, and—if water allows—venture by boat into the romantic **Bride and Groom Valley** (Buk u Zawa).

The road ahead is legendary: the **Hamilton Road**, carved into the mountains by the British. At every turn, the landscape offers breathtaking views, perfect for photos. By evening, we reach **Rawanduz**, once the capital of the Soran Emirate. We will see the first Kurdish cannon, watch the sun sink into the vast **Rawandîz Canyon**, and share a homely dinner in our guide's house. Overnight on the edge of the canyon.

Overnight in Rawandîz

Day 4

Rawandîz to Barzan

Breakfast with a canyon view sets the tone for the day. We journey to **Ali Bag Waterfall**, hearing the stories that cascade with its waters. Our path

then leads to **Shanidar Cave**, where Neanderthal remains revealed the earliest hints of human ritual and compassion. We continue to **Barzan**, where the Anfal Monument and **Barzani National Museum** honor the Kurdish struggle. The night will be spent in the mountain town of **Amedi**, a citadel in the clouds.

Overnight in Amedi

Day 5

Amedi to Duhok

Amedi welcomes us with history at every turn. We will pass through the **Behdinan Gate**, explore its *mosque, synagogue, and church*, and visit the grave of a remarkable **woman rabbi**.

Later, we'll step into tradition with a **tahini-making experience**, watching sesame seeds transform into rich paste as they have for centuries. Before departing, we'll stop at the elegant **Qubahan Madrasa**, then continue to Duhok for the night.

Overnight in Dohuk

Day 6

Diversity of Duhok

The day begins at **Shahid Café**, where breakfast is served among memories of Peshmerga who fought ISIS. Afterwards, we visit the **Maltai Cave**, with its grand Neo-Assyrian rock reliefs.

We then journey to the **Charsteen** Zoroastrian Temple, one of the oldest places of worship in the region, before ending the day at the vast **Mosul Dam**, standing across the mighty **Tigris**.

Overnight in Dohuk

Day 7

Ezdixan, the ancient religion of Kurds

Northward, we reach **Alqosh**, an ancient Assyrian town. High in the cliffs lies the **Rabban Hormizd Monastery**, carved from rock in the 7th century, where monks once wrote manuscripts that traveled across the Christian world.

Later, we will enter the valley of **Lalish**, the sacred home of the **Yazidi** faith. Walking barefoot along its stone paths, we will hear the stories of this ancient mystic religion and its resilience after the ISIS genocide.

Overnight in Dohuk

Day 8

Gozarto, the Assyrian World

After breakfast, we set off to **Khinnis**, where Assyrian kings carved monumental reliefs and even pressed wine centuries ago. Nearby, the **Jerwan Aqueduct** awaits, the oldest known aqueduct in the world, built of limestone blocks inscribed with cuneiform.

Our final stop is **Akre**. Here, we hike through winding alleys, stone houses, and climb to the ruins of **Mart Maryam Cathedral** and the ancient Akre

Castle, where caves hold forgotten secrets. From the summit, we watch the sun set over the **Nineveh Plains**—a perfect farewell to our journey.

We return to town for a celebratory dinner of local *Kurdish rice* from the Zab River and *qalya*, Akre's famed lamb dish.

Overnight in Erbil

Departure

After breakfast, we transfer to the airport for our flights home—taking with us not just memories, but the soul of Kurdistan.