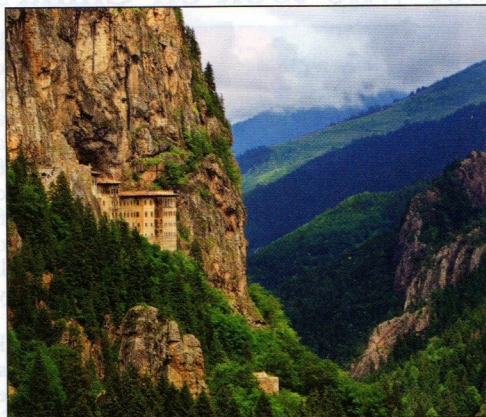


This week's dream: history and hiking in Turkey's northeast

Tell people in Istanbul you're going to visit Trabzon and Rize, and you may get some "quizzical" looks. These provinces at the eastern end of Turkey's Black Sea coast are best known for their damp climate, drab cities and "conservative" populace. But what's less well known is that they are also home to some of the country's finest mountainscapes and most "stunning" Byzantine monuments, says Thomas Roueché in *The Guardian* – and they are quite unspoiled by mass tourism. The region is both a hikers' paradise and a rich repository of history and myth, from Jason and the Argonauts to the "decadent" empire of Trebizond.

Founded by Greek traders in the 8th century BC, the city of Trabzon – formerly Trebizond – reached its zenith after seceding from Byzantine rule in 1204 AD. Its empire (which survived until the Ottomans conquered it in 1461) was small, but grew rich thanks to its position on the Silk Road. Today, the city is "dominated by a cement factory and a grim harbour", but the glorious 13th



Monastery of Sumela: a "maze of frescoed rooms"

century church of Hagia Sophia attests to its one-time wealth, with its Biblical frescoes and imposing arched façade. No less spectacular is the Orthodox Monastery of Sumela, carved into a mountainside an hour's drive away. A steep climb brings you to its "maze of frescoed rooms and corridors tunnelled deep into the stone".

In Rize, to the east, tea plantations "punctuated by slim white minarets" cascade down the mountains to misty, "deserted" Black Sea beaches. Inland, the craggy peaks of the Kackar range rise to almost 4,000m; fantastic hiking trails lead among them. Stay at a simple local inn, and enjoy home-cooked meals and evenings spent reading on

wooden balconies overlooking rushing rivers, or learning to dance the *horon*, "jumping and stamping in a circle" to the music of the *baglama* (a kind of lute). *Pegasus* (www.flypgs.com) flies from Istanbul to Trabzon from around £55rtn. The Hotel Doga (00 90 464 651 7455) in the Kackar region has doubles from £15pn.

Hotel of the week



Babylonstoren, Cape Winelands, South Africa

Babylonstoren is perhaps the best hotel in the Western Cape, says Ian Henderson in *The Sunday Telegraph*. Externally, it's much like the region's other wineries, with its white farm buildings and old manor house. But its interiors are exceptionally "cool", with "crisp, modern" furniture and antique timber floors. Guest cottages have vast bathrooms and "glass walls" overlooking the Franschoek mountains and the hotel's sizeable kitchen garden. It's this "contemplative" space – and the meals prepared with its produce – that set Babylonstoren apart.

Cottages from £350pn.
Contact: 00 27 21 863 3852;
www.babylonstoren.com.

Getting the flavour of...

An island paradise all to yourself

Private island resorts often boast of the peace and seclusion they offer their guests – but Ariara, a discreet little "paradise" in the Philippines, goes a step further than most, says Tom Adair in *Spectator Life*. The island, complete with "long golden beach" and "opulent" villas – is rented in its entirety (and only that way) to groups of up to 17. Newly opened for business by its British owners, Charles and Carrie McCulloch, it lies amid "hundreds" of other little islands in Palawan province, 160 miles south of Manila. With charming, efficient staff on hand, guests can eat when they like and participate in an array of watersports. There's even a 100ft trimaran for exploring the archipelago (don't miss the ruined Spanish fortress on the nearby island of Linapacan). *Audley Travel* (01993-838100, www.audleytravel.com) has seven nights from around £2,250pp (based on 17 sharing), incl. flights, meals and watersports.

Europe in north America

For an easy but glorious taste of the great Canadian wilderness, you can't beat the French-speaking province of Quebec, says Sarah Baxter in *Wanderlust*. Its capital, Quebec City, makes an ideal base: it's a "pocket of the Old World in the New" – "European in feel, amble-friendly and awfully pretty". Just 40km north lies the

Jacques-Cartier National Park, where moose and bears roam the hills around the Jacques Cartier river, great for kayaking. For a more genteel approach, try the spectacular three-hour journey on the Massif de Charlevoix railway along the precipitous banks of the "mighty" St Lawrence River. And be sure to take a whale-watching trip near the river's mouth: minke and fin whales are so numerous, the water is a "marine-life stew". *Bailey Robinson* (01488-689700, www.baileyrobinson.com) has a 7-night self-drive Quebec trip from £1,495pp incl. flights.

Halifax's magnificent Hall

With its "immense", colonnaded quadrangle, the Georgian Piece Hall in Halifax is a structure of rare magnificence – but it fell into disuse during the Industrial Revolution and has languished since. Now, however, there's a "brave" plan to restore it as a shopping centre and cultural venue, says Jan Morris in the *FT* – and it could attract visitors "from across the world" to this old Yorkshire mill town. The Hall was built in the 1770s as a wool exchange, where 300-odd weavers sold "pieces" (measures of cloth) to visiting merchants. By 1800, the rise of big factories had rendered it obsolete. Today, it houses only 30 small shops, though it's as grand as "a Spanish plaza": if it comes to life again, "you won't be able to miss it". See www.thepiecehall.co.uk.

Last-minute offers from top travel companies

Yorkshire gourmet break

A 2-night stay at the Doubletree by Hilton Sheffield Park (incl. Chatsworth House entry, 1 dinner, 1 afternoon tea) from £89pp b&cb. 0844-848 8488; www.greatlittlebreaks.com. Until 31 August.

Wolf-watching in Spain

Nature-watch in the northern province of Zamora during a 5-day trip for £695pp full board, incl. guide, transport & London flights. 01962-733051; www.naturetrek.co.uk. Departing 22 & 27 October.

North Carolina self-drive

A 7-night tour around scenic North Carolina, incl. the Blue Ridge Mountains, costs from £1,495pp (varied board), incl. London flights & car hire. 01582-469777; www.vacations.toamerica.com. Through May.

Hiking in Armenia

Ascent the Aragats South peak, during a 9-night trek, which costs from £1,245pp incl. all meals & guide (excl. flights). 0845-301 4737; www.walksworldwide.com. Depart 3 June or 8 July.