IRAQ

DETAILED ITINERARY **21 DAYS** Oct 01/26

Erbil

Journey to modern day Iraq , a destination of incredible diversity, embracing a welcoming culture in a land known as the 'Cradle of Civilization'! Explore the wonders of ancient Mesopotamia, home to the Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians! The first systems of writing and of justice are believed to have originated from this historic region, with a history dating back almost 7,000 years.

Our adventure starts in Basra before heading north-west to the 'The Mesopotamian Marshes', which we explore by boat before visiting the Ziggurat or Ur (pyramid) dating back to 2,100BC and the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham. We explore ancient Uruk, the site of the first written words and the spiritual shrines of Najaf and Karbala. Visit the world's largest graveyard with over 8 million graves, Al-Ukaidir fort (UNESCO) and 1600 year old Al-Qiser Church, standing isolated in the dessert.

FACTS & HIGHLIGHTS

• 21 land days • Maximum 16 travelers • Starts in Basra and finishes in Erbil • All meals included • See the ancient Arch of Ctesiphon • Explore the ruins of ancient Babylon (UNESCO) • Visit Al-Ukhaidir fortress • Journey to the religious and spiritual sites of Karbala and Najaf • Explore the great Ziggurat of Ur • Meander through the Mesopotamian Marshes by boat • Visit the Minaret in Ancient Samarra (UNESCO) • Enjoy the Parthian ruins of Hatra (UNESCO) and ancient Ashur (UNESCO) • Climb up to the Citadel of Erbil (UNESCO) • Hike to Shanidar 'Neanderthal' cave • Visit Lalish, holiest temple of the Yazidis

DEPARTURE DATES & PRICE

Apr 26 - May 16, 2027	-	**$9995 USD**
Oct 29 - Nov 18, 2027	-	**$9995 USD**
Apr 02 - Apr 22, 2028	-	**$10395 USD**

Activity Level: **2**
Comfort Level: Some long drives. Women must wear an abaya, a full-coverage garment, to enter the shrine. Your guide will provide this garment for you. Alcoholic beverages may not be available except for Baghdad and Kurdistan.

ACCOMMODATIONS

We stay in comfortable accommodations with private bathrooms.

We continue to the fabled, ancient city of Babylon (UNESCO) where we walk the ancient processional ways once traversed by kings, prophets, and conquerors—including Alexander the Great, who died here. Enjoy the once opulent but abandoned Palace of Saddam Hussein overlooking Babylon before spending time in the capital of Baghdad with its palaces, madrasses and markets and world famous museum of ancient antiquities. We also venture out to 2 wonderful ancient sites of Ctesiphon (UNESCO - largest barrel arch in the world) and Dur Kurigalzu Ziggurat.

Continuing north, explore 2 ancient minarets, including Samarra (UNESCO) with its Great Mosque, Ashur (UNESCO), and the impressive ruins of Hatra (UNESCO), a once powerful desert fortress. Enjoy a tour of the old town of Mosul, and Nimrud, famous for it's stone reliefs.

We explore the beautiful mountainous region of Kurdistan with stops at mountain monasteries, tombs, and Assyrian villages. Visit Lalish, holiest temple of the Yazidis and hike to Shanidar Cave, home to Neanderthals dating back 65,000 years. Visit the ancient city of Amadiya, tomb of Nahum (Prophet from the Old Testament; 7th Century BC), sites of Sulaymaniyah and the Barzan Memorial, honoring victims of the genocide committed by Saddam Hussein.

Finally, we finish our adventure in Erbil, an early center of Christianity and the capital of the Kurdistan region and one of the most ancient cities in the world dating back to 2300 BC. Mesopotamia, and now modern Iraq, have throughout history experienced great prosperity and epic wars. After recent turmoil, be among the first to return to see and experience the culture and cuisine of modern day Iraq and the ancient history of Mesopotamia and the Cradle of Civilization.

Mesopotania Marshes

DAY 1 • ARRIVE BASRA, IRAQ

Meet your local representative on arrival at Basra International airport and transfer to your hotel. Remainder of day at leisure until meeting your fellow travelers and tour leader at the welcome dinner this evening.

Overnight in Basra.

DAY 2 • BASRA SITES

We start our day exploring the historic architecture and cultural heritage of Old Basra including traditional merchant houses, an old tea House, Armenian church, Jewish Synagogue, St Thomas Chaldean Church, all of which reflect the city's rich trade history and religious diversity. Enjoy lunch in an old traditional tea house/museum and an art gallery across the street.

In the afternoon, we take a boat trip on the Shatt al-Arab River, which is formed from the meeting of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers before emptying into the Persian Gulf. We will pass by the Italian Bridge and Saddam Hussein's palace and yacht and later we may have a chance to go inside his personal yacht.

If Saddam Hussein's former palace (now a museum) is open, we will start our day's activities with a visit.

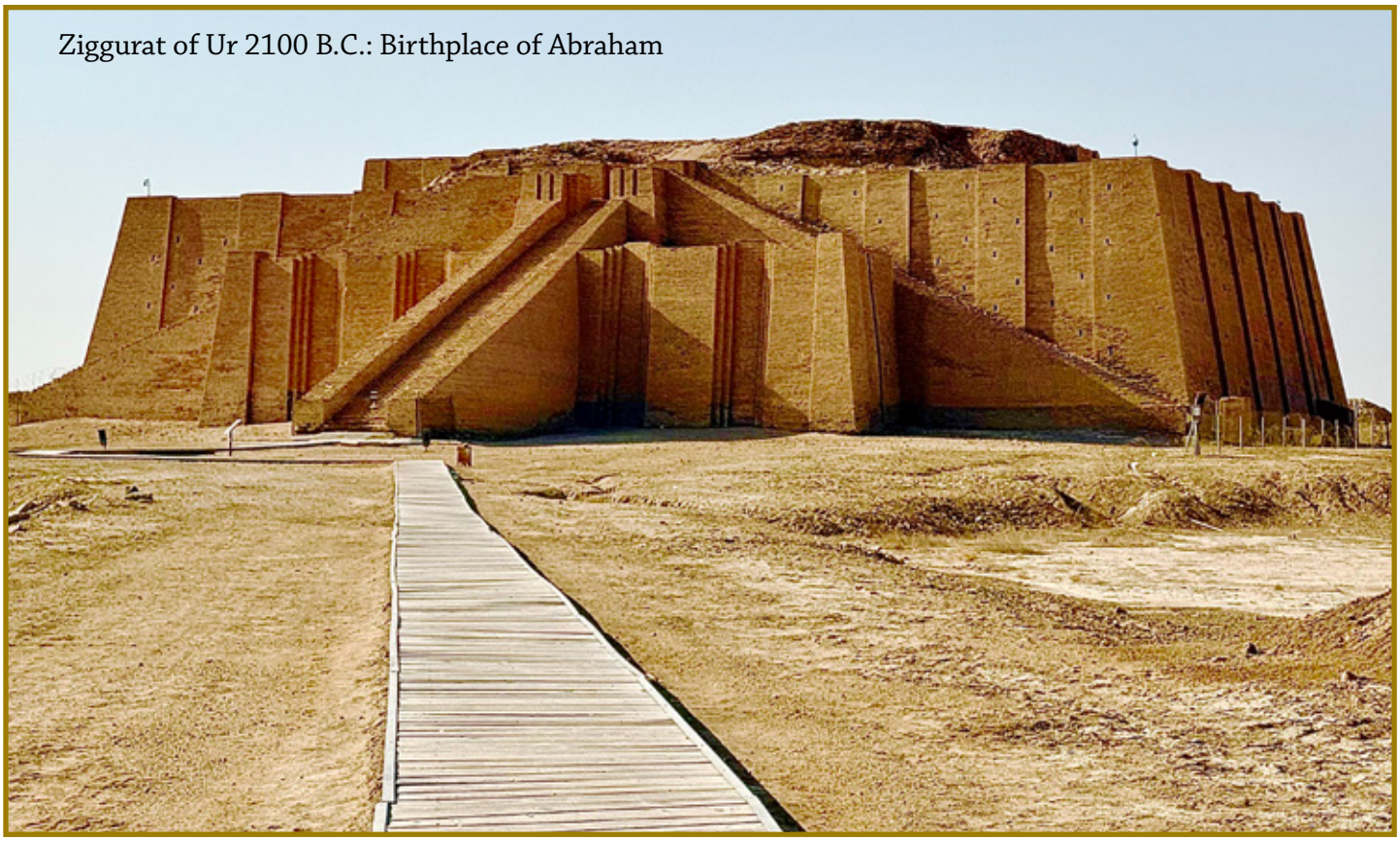
Overnight in Basra.

DAY 3 • CONVERGENCE OF THE EUPHRATES & TIGRIS RIVERS; MESOPOTAMIAN MARSHES TO NASIRIYAH

We depart Basra and travel north-west to Nasiriyah. Our first stop is the Mesopotamian Marshes, nestled in the floodplain between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and is the largest wetlands in the Middle East Mesopotania means "land between two rivers". The wetlands provide a habitat for hundreds of birds and fish species, water buffalo and home to thousands of Marsh Arabs who call this home. Some historians believe that these marshlands were once the biblical Garden of Eden.

We will have a traditional dish caught in the

Ziggurat of Ur 2100 B.C.: Birthplace of Abraham



Uruk: The first written words started here

marshes called masgouf, served in a traditional reed building. After lunch we explore the Marshes by boat. In the late afternoon, we continue to Nasiriyah where we will have dinner and spend the night.

Overnight in Nasiriya.

DAY 4 • ZIGGURAT OF ANCIENT UR (BIRTHPLACE OF ABRAHAM)

This morning we drive to the ancient city of Ur with it's impressive ziggurat (built around 2100 BC) and it's adjoining Royal Tombs. This is also where the Bible (Genesis 11:28-31 and Genesis 15:7) refers to Ur being the birthplace of Abraham, making it revered by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. While inhabited since prehistoric times, Ur rose to prominence in the 27th century BC before declining due to political and climatic changes, including the rise of the Persian Empire.

Overnight in Nasiriya.

DAY 5 • URUK (WORLD'S OLDEST CITY); HOLY CITY OF NAJAF

We drive to Uruk, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the world's first cities and a true cradle of civilization. We explore the ruins of Uruk and learn about its historical significance as this is believed to be the site of the 'first written Words'. Uruk is not the absolute oldest human settlement, but it is widely considered the world's first true, complex city. Flourishing around 3200 BC, it pioneered early writing (cuneiform - the earliest known writing system. The script was created by pressing a cut reed stylus into soft clay tablets to form distinctive wedge-shaped marks), monumental mud-brick architecture, and massive urban populations. While settlements like Jericho and Eridu are often cited as older, they lack the monumental architecture, written records, and social hierarchies that define a true city.

In the afternoon, we travel to Najaf. In the evening we will visit the Imam Ali's Shrine, one of the most sacred sites in Shia Islam. We will have the opportunity to visit inside the shrine and experience its profound spiritual significance amongst the throngs of pilgrims.

Overnight in Najaf.

DAY 6 • AL KIFL - TOMB OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL; EXPLORE NAJAF AND WADI AL-SALAAM - WORLD'S LARGEST CEMETRY

We start our day with a visit to Wadi Al Salam, the largest graveyard in the world. It is estimated to have up to 9 million graves! There are multiple levels underground, and to be buried here is considered a path to Paradise by some Shia Muslims. Visit the Grand Mosque of Kufa, one of the oldest Mosques in the world.

After lunch, we depart Najaf for the town of Al-Kifl, where we may view of the 6th-century BC tomb of the prophet Ezekiel. While entry is typically restricted, our guide will attempt to secure special access. Revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the site was once a synagogue and is now a mosque. Its architecture blends Islamic artistry with Hebrew inscriptions. Uniquely, its mihrab—the prayer niche—faces Jerusalem, predating the shift in Qibla to Mecca.

Overnight in Karbala.

الصمد

Shrine of Al Abbas - Karbala

DAY 7 • SACRED KARBALA; UKHAIDER FORTRESS

Today we depart for Al-Ukhaidir Fort (on the UNESCO tentative list), an impressive early Islamic fortress known for its unique defensive structures and architectural significance. Not far from the Fort, we venture out to a 4th century abandoned church, in a state of ruins, surrounded by desert. At one point it was the site of a sizable early Christian community.

We then visit the shrines of Imam Hussein and Abbas, sacred pilgrimage sites of profound

importance to Shia Muslims.

Overnight in Karbala.

DAY 8 • ANCIENT BABYLON; CTESIPHON TO BAGHDAD

Today we travel to the Mesopotamian city of Babylon and explore the ruins of this legendary ancient city. Few cities from the ancient world have the myths and legends with that of Babylon. The mystery associated with the Hanging Gardens of Babylon have been lingering for millennium. Learn about recent theories that challenge where the Hanging Gardens may have actually been. We then visit Saddam Hussein's Palace, with stunning views overlooking Babylon.

We enjoy lunch at a traditional Iraqi restaurant.

After lunch, we drive to ancient Ctesiphon, capital of the Parthian & Sassania Empires. Ctesiphon is famous for having the largest barrel arch in the world.

We continue to Baghdad where we will check into our hotel. Dinner this evening will be in a local restaurant.

Overnight in Baghdad.

DAY 9 • BAGHDAD - IRAQ NATIONAL MUSEUM & DUR-KURIGALZU

Today, we visit the Iraq Museum, home to an extensive collection of artifacts showcasing Iraq's rich and ancient history.

We also stop at the Martyrs Monumemt and Al-Shaheed Monument, a memorial dedicated to Iraqi soldiers. We drive to Dur-Kurigalzu, An ancient city just outside of Baghdad, to see it's impressive, well-preserved ziggurat and learn about its historical significance.

Please Note: The Iraqi museum has been closed for renovations in 2025 and is scheduled to open again in 2026.

Overnight in Baghdad.

DAY 10 • EXPLORING BAGHDAD - ABBASID PALACE & MUTANABI STREET

This morning, we will explore some of Baghdad's bazaars, street markets and stunning Islamic

architecture. Baghdad's historic sites include the Mustansiriya Madrasa, the coppersmith market, Shabandar café (the most famous tea house in Baghdad), and Al-Mutanabi Street, famous for its book market.

We have lunch at a traditional Iraqi restaurant. Afterwards, enjoy a boat ride on the Tigris river.

Overnight in Baghdad.

DAY 11 • GREAT MOSQUE OF SAMARRA; ANCIENT ASHUR - TO MOSUL

After breakfast, we will drive two and a half hours to Samarra to visit its famous mosque and tower. The Great Mosque of Samarra, completed in 851

Babylon

Find your inner explorer in Iraq!

Ctesiphon

Al Akhdar Castle

Central Baghdad

Dur-Kurigalzu Ziggurat

Martyrs Monument - Baghdad

Ancient Hatra

Ancient Hatra

AD, was once among the largest mosques in the world. Though destroyed in 1278 AD by Hulagu Khan, its outer wall and the striking Malwiyah Minaret still stand. The 150-foot-high spiral minaret is an architectural marvel, though climbing is now prohibited due to safety concerns. We will make a short drive north to visit the Abu Dulaf Mineret, another 9th century site known for its distinctive spiral minaret.

After lunch, we continue to Ashur (UNESCO) which dates back to the 3rd millennium BC. It was the first capital of the Assyrian Empire, (14th - 9th centuries BC), It also served as the religious and trading capital of the Assyrians, named after the god Ashur.

Later, we arrive in Mosul and check into our hotel.

Overnight in Mosul.

DAY 12 • ANCIENT HATRA, ASHUR; OLD MOSUL, NIMRUD

We begin our day with a very early departure to Hatra to ensure sufficient time at the site. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is renowned for its remarkably well-preserved temples and fortifications of the Parthian Empire (200 BC–220 AD). We explore the impressive ruins and experience the grandeur of this once-powerful desert fortress.

We then return to Mosul, where we tour the Old Town and walk through the bustling streets of the Old Market, a place where history and modern life coexist. We also visit areas of the old city that were destroyed during the war with ISIS, offering insight into Mosul's recent history and resilience.

Later in the day, we travel to the archaeological site of Nimrud, the ancient Assyrian capital. Here we explore the ruins of the royal palace, massive stone reliefs, and the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III at this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Overnight in Mosul.

DAY 13 • MAR MATTAI MONASTERY; AL- QOSH VILLAGE; TOMB OF NAHUM; TO DUHOK

We begin the day with a visit to Mar Mattai Monastery, one of the oldest Christian monasteries in Iraq, perched high on a mountain with stunning panoramic views. We explore its impressive architecture and learn about its long and fascinating religious history.

We then continue to Al-Qosh, a picturesque Assyrian village with deep historical and cultural roots. Here we visit the Tomb of Nahum, believed to be the burial place of the Biblical prophet, a sacred site for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. We take time to walk through the charming streets of Al-Qosh, offering a glimpse into Assyrian heritage and daily life.

Finally, we embark on a scenic drive to Duhok.

Overnight in Duhok.

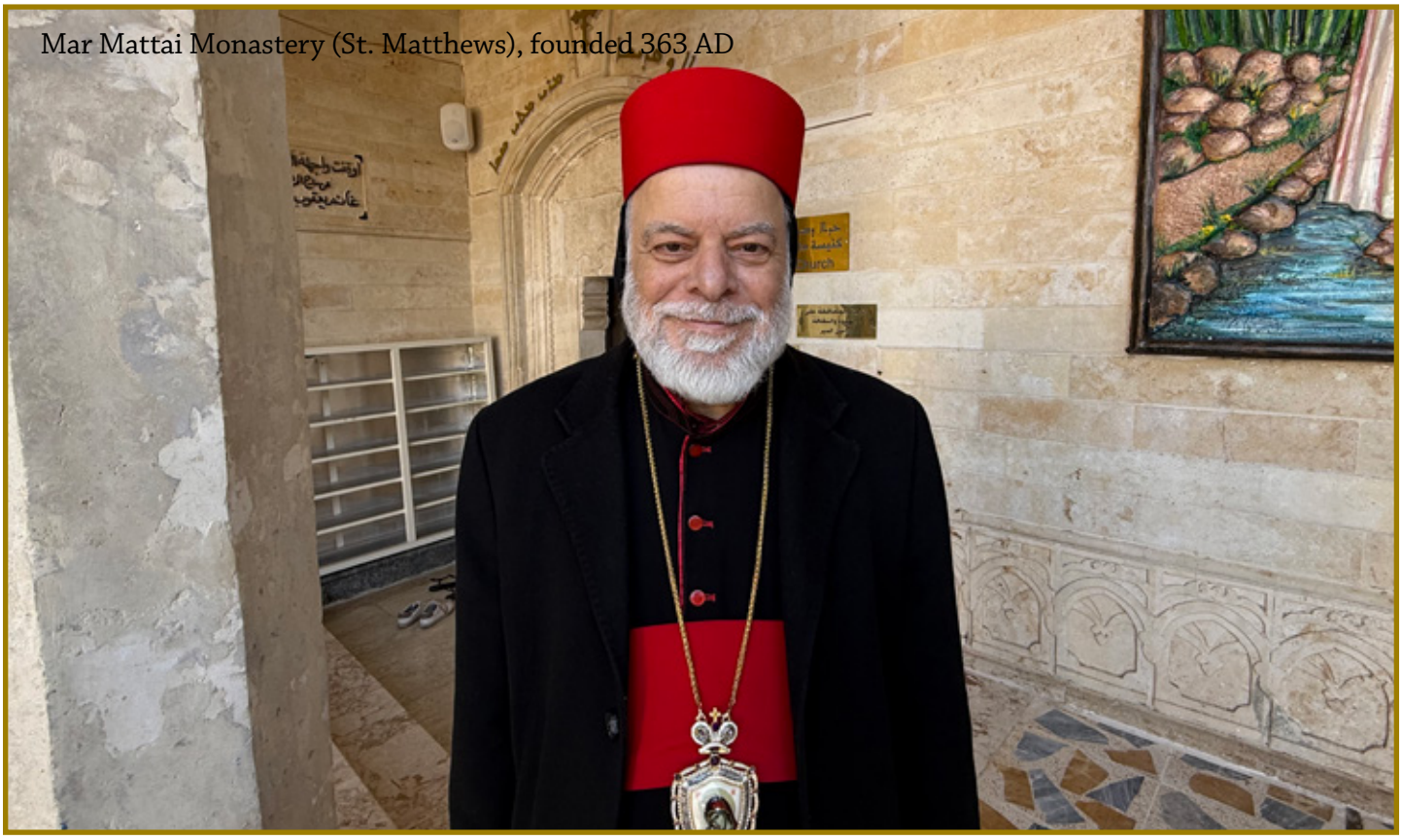
DAY 14 • LALISH - SACRED PILGRIMAGE SITE OF THE YEZIDIS; ANCIENT SITES EN ROUTE TO DUHOK

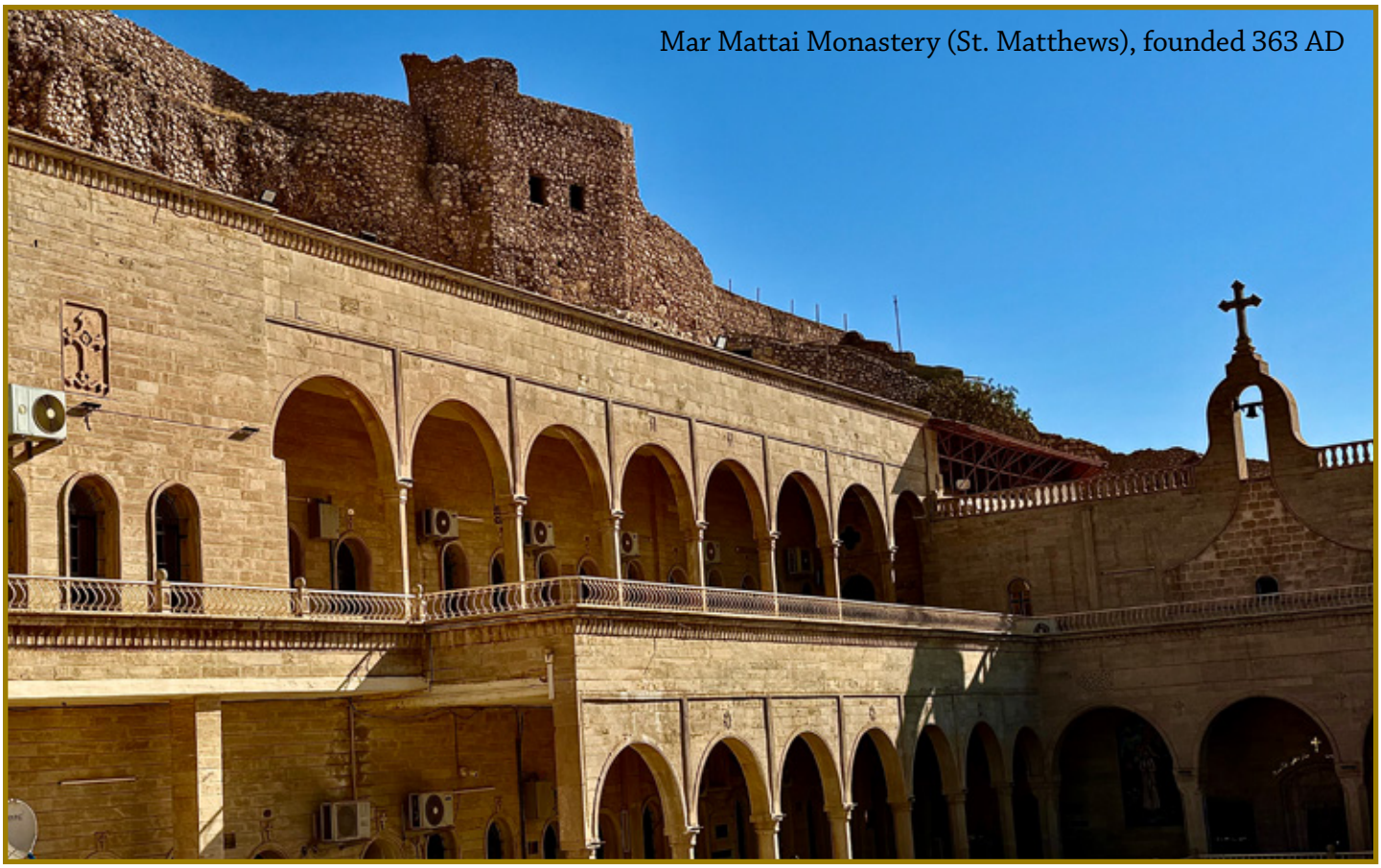
We depart for Gaugamela, the epic, historic battlefield where Alexander the Great defeated King Darius III. Next, we visit the 4th-century Dayro d-Mor Matay (St. Matthew's Monastery), one of eastern Christendom's most revered sites, in near-continuous use for almost 2,000 years.

We then head to Jirwan, home to the oldest known aqueduct bridge, built under Sennacherib in 690 BC. This marvel,part of an ancient system that watered Nineveh's gardens, features massive

Malwiyah Minaret

Nimrud Relief


Mar Mattai Monastery (St. Matthews), founded 363 AD


Mar Mattai Monastery (St. Matthews), founded 363 AD

Zakho Bridge

Samarra Minaret

hand-carved stones engraved with the story of this engineering feat—revealing the "hidden message of Sennacherib". Lunch is at Newroz Restaurant, a well-known stop for travelers, offering simple local cuisine. Afterward, we visit Lalish, the sacred pilgrimage site of the Yezidis, a mysterious people whose traditions may link to ancient Zoroastrianism or Mithraism, although the Yezidis believe their faith predates all other religions.

We'll enjoy dinner at the hotel's restaurant with stunning views of the city.

Overnight in Duhok.

DAY 15 • THE ANCIENT STONE ARCH BRIDGE OF ZAKHO

This morning we travel to Zakho on the Turkish border and see the Roman Delal or Zakho Bridge (locally called Pira Delal), believed to have been first built during the Roman Empire, while the present structure appears to be from the Abbasid era. We will also see Zakho Museum, Zakho Castle, and surrounding neighborhoods, including the old Synagogue and Jewish Quarter of the city. Zakho is the gateway to Kurdistan from Turkey and one of the busiest borders in Iraq.

Return to Duhok for dinner.

Overnight in Duhok.

DAY 16 • ANCIENT CITY OF AMADIYA; SHANIDAR 'NEANDERTHAL' CAVE

Today our drive takes us to the picturesque, historic town of Amedi, perched on a hilltop. It's history dates back more than 3,000 years. One of our main stops here will be the Mosul Gate which was built in the 13th century. We also stop to take in views of the Great Zab River, which originates in Van Lake in Turkey and flows into the Tigris River. The river has great historical significance, bearing witness to some of history's great battles.

We continue to Shanidar 'Neanderthal' Cave, which was home to Neanderthals at least 65,000 years ago. Climb the steps (15 – 20 minutes) up to the cave entrance where you can go inside. There are sometimes archaeologists present who are continuing to search for more remains of this fascinating site, perhaps the most important Neanderthal find in the world, which was recently featured in a Netflix special.

In the late afternoon, we continue on to Barzan, where we check in for the evening.

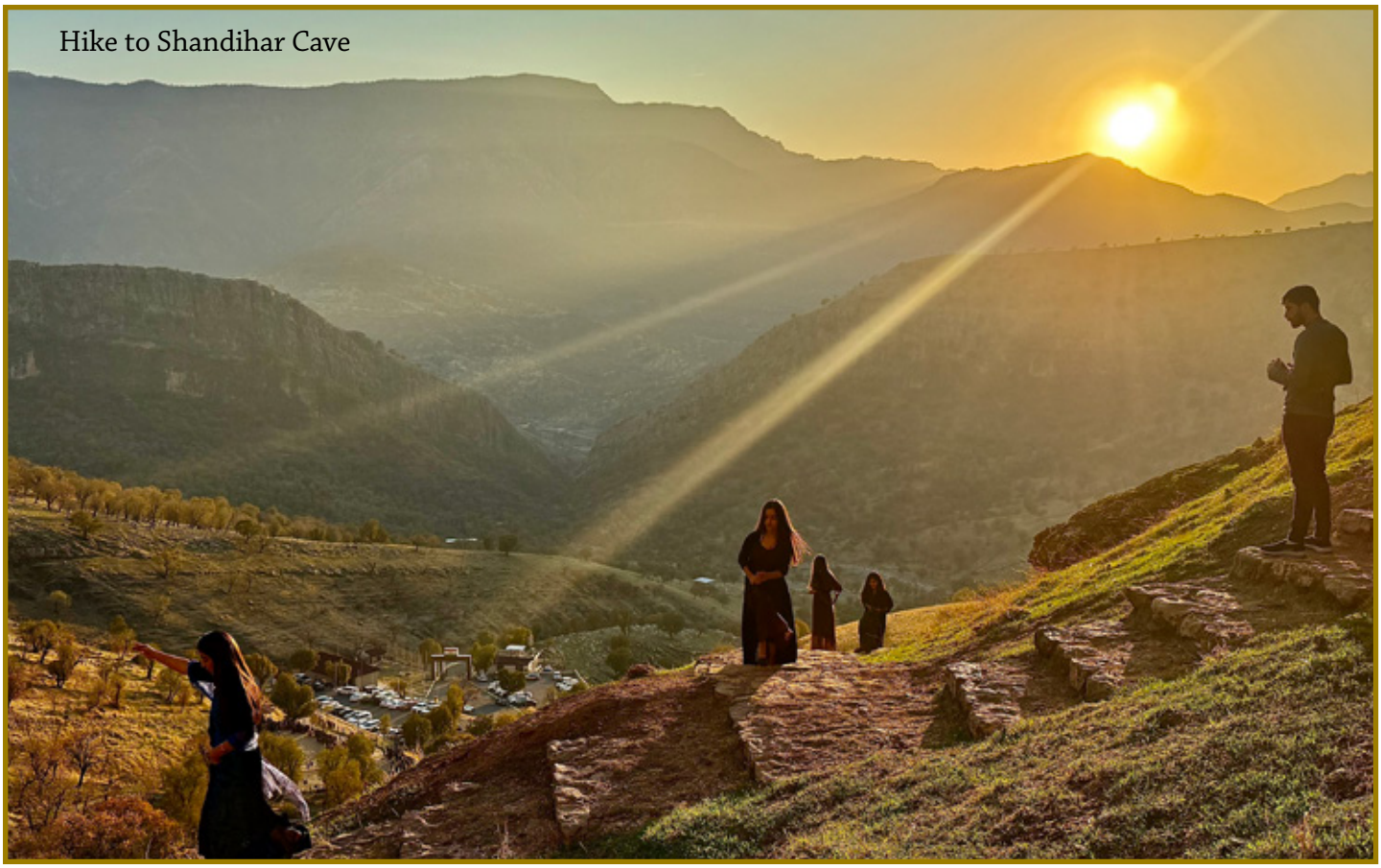
Overnight in Barzan.

DAY 17 • HISTORIC HAMILTON ROAD TO BEKHAL WATERFALL; TO SULAYMANIYAH

We travel along the remarkable Hamilton Road, a historic engineering achievement carved through the mountains by Alexander Hamilton to connect Shaqlawa to Iran. We walk a stretch of this ancient route before stopping at Bekhal Waterfall to enjoy tea or coffee amid the natural beauty.

We leave the Rawanduz region, heading toward Sulaymaniyah, passing Lake Dokan and stopping for lunch at Kosratynwe, a traditional Kurdish roadside restaurant popular with locals. Known as "Suly," Sulaymaniyah was founded in the late 18th century. The city is home to key cultural sites, including the Amna Suraka Museum, documenting the atrocities committed against the Kurds under Saddam Hussein, and the Sulaymaniyah Museum, which houses Kurdish, Iraqi, and Persian artifacts.

Shanidar 'Neanderthal' Cave


Hike to Shandihar Cave

Lalish - Sacred Pilgrimage Site of the Yezidis

Upon arrival, we can explore the vibrant bazaar, famous for its sweets, especially "Manna," a nougat-like treat spiced with cardamom and nuts. Those who prefer may head directly to the hotel.

Overnight in Sulaymaniyah.

DAY 18 • SULAYMANIYAH SITES

In the morning, we visit the Red House (Amna Suraka), the former intelligence headquarters where many atrocities were committed under Saddam Hussein. This haunting site offers a powerful insight into the suffering endured by the Kurdish people. We then visit the Sulaymaniyah Museum of Antiquities, home to Kurdistan's most extensive collection of ancient artifacts.

After lunch at one of Sulaymaniyah's top local restaurants, we depart for Halabja. On March 16, 1988, Saddam Hussein launched a chemical attack here, killing at least 5,000 and injuring thousands more. We visit the Halabja Museum and Memorial Cemetery, a sobering tribute to the victims of this atrocity.

Overnight in Sulaymaniyah.

DAY 19 • ZARZI/QIZQAPAN CAVE; KOYA CARAVANSERAI; TO ERBIL

After breakfast, we drive back to Erbil, stopping en route at one of Kurdistan's most significant historic sites— Zarzi/Qizqapan Cave. This location features two key elements: a rare Zarzian site dating back to 18,000–8000 BC and a Median-era tomb from around 500–300 BC, often linked to ancient legends.

We then continue to Koysinjaq (Koya), an old Jewish city, to visit a restored caravanserai once used by Silk Road travelers. We pause at a scenic vantage point offering sweeping views across the region, with time for photos. Lunch will be at a traditional local restaurant along the way.

Overnight in Erbil.

DAY 20 • HIGHLIGHTS OF THE KURDISH CAPITAL: CITADEL OF ERBIL; FAREWELL DINNER

This morning, we head to the Citadel of Erbil, one of the oldest continuously inhabited settlements in the world. Explore Citadel with it's fascinating history while enjoying panoramic views of the city. We will visit a small textile and gem museum. Walk through Erbil's old bazaar filled with friendly locals.

Tonight we will have our farewell dinner to reflect on the ancient wonders of Mesopotamia and the many friendly encounters with locals in modern day Iraq!

Overnight in Erbil.

DAY 21 • DEPART ERBIL

Enjoy breakfast in the morning, then transfer to the airport for your flight home.

Kurdish Landscape

Erbil

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. HOW BIG ARE THE GROUPS?

Each group is limited to 16 participants. Small groups are an important ingredient in adventure travel. Small groups allow for more interaction and more personalized service throughout the itinerary.

2. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

All accommodations throughout; all meals, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); bottled drinking water throughout the trip; all internal transportation; airport transfers on day 1 and departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); all day trips and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary; tips for hotels (porterage), national guide, bus driver, restaurants and spot guides; services of a trip leader.

3. WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

International flights, tips to ElderTreks tour leader, alcoholic drinks, visas and travel insurance.

4. ARE THESE "EDUCATIONAL" TOURS?

Yes, in the broadest sense of the word, "educational". We visit museums and local villages. We also have talks and discussions on many aspects of Iraqi history and culture, but this is only one aspect of what we do.
We believe that it is equally educational to meet new people on a non-commercial basis, visit their homes and even try to learn a few words in the native language. Sometimes the most "educational" moments are spent having a cold drink with locals in a street market.

5. HOW DO WE TRAVEL DURING THE TOUR?

All land transportation is included in the land price of the trip. We have our own vehicles for road travel — we use a van or coach. We also use boats in the Mesopotamian marshes and on the Shatt al-Arab river in Basra.

6. WHAT ARE OUR ACCOMMODATIONS LIKE?

We stay in comfortable, well located accommodations with private bathrooms throughout.

7. WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?

Temperatures are hotter in the south with lows around 14 C (or mid 50's F) and highs into the low 30's C (mid 80's F)

Temperatures are cooler in the north with lows going down to 6 C (or 43 F) to daily highs around 18/19 C (or around 70 F)

There is not much rainfall in the south but typically rains more in the north. Rainfall in Iraq is seasonal and occurs mostly during the winter season during December through February for most of the country except in the north and northeast, where the rainy season is from November to April.

8. WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

A non-refundable deposit of $500 USD (plus insurance if you desire it) is due as soon as you decide to go and will reserve your place on the tour. The balance of the land payment is due 120 days before departure. Cancellation charges are applicable and these are outlined in the "Terms & Conditions" section of our brochure.

9. IS MEDICAL INSURANCE REQUIRED?

Insurance coverage is not included in the cost of your trip. Please note that medical insurance is not required for this adventure but is recommended. ElderTreks offers comprehensive travel insurance and we are happy to provide you with a quote if you call our office. If you are purchasing insurance elsewhere, please ensure you provide the details to ElderTreks as soon as possible.
Please note those travelers with pre-existing medical conditions must take out travel insurance at the time of deposit

10. WHAT MEALS ARE INCLUDED?

All meals are included, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day. In many cases, we simply order a number of shared dishes, so that we can try everything.

11. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ON THE TOUR?

There is a detailed "What to Take" list in our Trip Kit, which we will send to you after you have booked the trip.

12. CAN YOU ARRANGE MY FLIGHTS?

We would be happy to take care of your air arrangements. ElderTreks offers personalized flight itineraries — not group flights. Stop over enroute, come in a few days early, or extend your stay. Call us for a customized itinerary.

13. WHAT IF I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about the adventure, please call our office for more details. A Trip Specialist will be happy to answer your questions. A Trip Kit containing further details on the destination will be sent to you once you have booked the trip.

Lalish