



KURDISTAN THE YAZIDI FESTIVAL

October 10 - October 19, 2024
Led By Local Guides

Can be combined with Iraq tour (October 19 - November 02, 2024)

Nestled in the heart of the Middle East, the region of Kurdistan remains an enigmatic and captivating land. Its history is deeply intertwined with various cultures, religions, and civilizations that have left an indelible mark on the landscape. Among the diverse communities residing here, the Yazidis hold a special place, carrying with them ancient beliefs and a vibrant cultural heritage. During the festival, you will have the chance to witness age-old rituals that have been passed down through generations. From sacred processions to elaborate ceremonies, every act holds deep significance to the Yazidi community. You might witness the mystical dance of the dervishes or be a part of the traditional candlelight evening prayer known as *Jamayi*.

If you're seeking an unforgettable adventure that combines cultural immersion and natural beauty, attending the Yazidi Festival in Kurdistan is a perfect choice. Don't miss the chance to explore this enchanting region and witness the magic of the Yazidi traditions.

Ihab Zaki
Managing Director

Thursday, October 10

Arrive in Erbil (KURDISTAN)



Upon arrival in **Erbil**, a special VIP taxi will transfer you to *Ramada Hotel or similar*, for check-in, dinner and overnight. **(D)**

Note: Standard check-in time is 3:00 pm. if you arrive on October 09 or early morning of October 10, an extra Hotel night needs to be booked.

Friday, October 11

Erbil (Lalish)



After breakfast, depart for beautiful ancient hilltop town of **Akre**, known as the capital of Newroz. Walk around the town square and hike to Akre castle (About 300 steps and 15 min walk uphill) to enjoy the view. embark on an exciting journey to **Lalish**, nestled in a beautiful mountain valley in the north of Iraq near Mosul. Lalish holds immense significance as the most sacred town for the Yazidi religion, making it a remarkable destination for cultural and religious exploration. Our first stop is the breathtaking **Temple of Lalish**. Engaging with the pilgrims allows us to gain firsthand insights into their faith, customs, and rituals. We may join them in their prayers, soak in their spiritual traditions, and participate in the magnificent festivities that mark this special occasion.

Spend the afternoon mingling with the locals and immerse yourself in the joyous atmosphere of the Autumn assembly celebrations. The colorful displays, traditional music, and lively dances will captivate your senses. As the day draws to a close and our hearts are filled with beautiful memories, drive back to Erbil, and return to the *Hotel*, for dinner and overnight.

Note: When visiting Lalish, shoes are not allowed; you should wear socks.

Saturday, October 12

Erbil - Duhok

After breakfast at the *Hotel's* main restaurant, depart for **Gaugamela**, to the site of the famous battle between

King Darius III and Alexander the Great. Then visit the 4th-century **Dayro d-Mor Matay Monastery** (St. Matthew's Monastery). This monastery is one of eastern Christendom's most famous sites and has been in continuous use for nearly 2,000 years, apart from a few forced closures. After lunch, head to **Jirwan** to see **the oldest aqueduct and bridge** ruins in the world, built during the time of Sennacherib (690 BC). The site was once part of a vast complex that was built to water the gardens of Nineveh. Huge stones transported by hand from quarries many miles away are engraved with the story of this impressive feat. Discover the secret of the "**hidden message of Sennacherib**". Transfer to *Rixos Hotel or similar* in **Duhok** for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)** **Please note that while alcohol is served in the Rixos Hotel restaurants, guests are not allowed to bring their own bottles of alcohol into the hotel (small or large). Please leave them on the bus before entering the hotel or ask your guide for assistance if you have any.**

Sunday, October 13

Duhok



After breakfast, head to **Al Qush** and see the **tomb of Nahum**, the Old Testament Prophet (7th Century BC), which is situated next to the early Christian **Mar Gorgis Monastery** and **Mar Mekha Churches**, a **7th Century Monastery** in the mountains above the tomb. Six hundred monks once inhabited the caves around the Monastery, and there is a Mongol cemetery across the valley where attackers were buried after one of many attempts to destroy the Monastery. **Rabban Hormizd Monastery** is an important site of the Chaldean Church. It is carved out of the mountains about two miles from Alqosh, Iraq, 28 miles north of Mosul (ancient Nineveh prophesied against by Nahum). Founded about 640 A.D., the Monastery has been the official residence of the patriarchs of the Eliya line of the Church of the East from 1551 to the 18th century, and after the union with Rome in the early 19th century, it became a prominent monastery of the Chaldean Church (Eastern

Rite Catholic). It is named after Rabban Hormisd, who founded it and is buried within the sanctuary. Time permitting, we may visit the nearby **Al Qosh Museum** and a local **Christian orphanage** run by Chaldean nuns. It is forbidden to adopt children in Iraq, and the extended family usually takes in orphaned Kurds. This particular orphanage is unique and provides a rare insight into the cultures and traditions of the region. . Then visit **Zakho** on the Turkish border and an ancient Roman bridge, as well as other features of this important trading city-once, a center of Judaism in Kurdistan. Return to Dohuk and, if time permits, enjoy a scenic ride on the city's teleferic, referred to by locals as Buk u Zawa (the Bride and the Groom). Enjoy dinner at one of Dohuk's finest restaurants, then transfer to the *Hotel* for check-in and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, October 14

Duhok - Rawanduz



A buffet breakfast will be served in the main restaurant at the hotel, then depart for **Amadiya**, an ancient city dating back to the Assyrian era (700 BC). Located on a high promontory (4,600 ft.) above a breathtaking landscape and fed by a geothermal spring originating far below the mountain, Amadiya was once an almost impenetrable fortress. The **City Gate** (Bab Zebar), located on the city's eastern side, was built between 500-600 AD. Pass by the ruins of an **ancient synagogue** in this once-important Jewish center. Local traditions hold that the Magi (Three Wise Men) of Christmas fame began their journey from here. Continue through spectacular scenery to **Rawanduz** and stop briefly at **Barzan** to see the **Barzan Memorial** commemorating the genocide committed by Saddam against the Barzan tribe. Hear about Mullah Mustapha Barzani (the founder of modern Kurdistan and, if time permits, visit the nearby **memorial** to this important historical figure. Drive through the **Soran District**, located close to the borders of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.

Enjoy lunch along the way at a traditional local eatery, then pass by **Shanidar Cave**, where some of the world's most important pre-historic remains were discovered, including the most famous Neanderthal, "**Nandy**." Learn how this 1955 discovery changed the thinking of many anthropologists about the nature of Neanderthals that lived here some 35,000 to 65,000 years ago. Time permitting, have an opportunity to climb the steps to the Cave itself if you want to. Enjoy dinner at the village of Rezan, Kurdistan's most famous fish restaurant (other dishes are also served), then transfer to *Rubar Resort* or similar located

on the banks of the Great Zab River for check-in, where we will enjoy the resort's facilities and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Note: Barzan is a "dry region," and alcohol is not served.

Tuesday, October 15

Rawanduz - Sulaymania



Begin the day with a drive to **Sulaymania** via the beautiful Lake of Dokan, the largest lake in Iraq, passing along the incredible **Hamilton Road**, one of the great engineering feats of the past centuries. Alexander Hamilton cut a path from Shaqlawa to Iran against insurmountable odds. Walk along one of the oldest parts of Hamilton Road. Then head to see **Bekhal Waterfall** and enjoy a cup of tea or coffee. Stop for lunch at Kosraty Nwe Restaurant and enjoy the delicious local cuisine. In the late afternoon, time permitting, experience the sunset at **Goizha Mountain** overlooking the city of Sulaymania with a view of hundreds of miles on a clear day. Transfer to *Millennium Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, & overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, October 16

Sulaymania



Begin the day with a visit to the **Red House (Amna Suraka)**, the site of many atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein at the former intelligence HQ and jail. Visit the **Sulaymania Museum of Antiquities** to view Kurdistan's largest collection of artifacts that date back thousands of years. We will arrange for you to meet with the museum's director (depending on availability), who will talk about how the home of irreplaceable treasures has withstood looting and war during Kurdistan's most chaotic times. Enjoy lunch at one of Sulaymania's fine local restaurants. *(Due to Newroz, the museums may be closed, so we will proceed to Halabja and enjoy a picnic lunch in Byara.* Continue to **Halabja**, where on March 16, 1988, Saddam Hussein ordered using chemical weapons to attack 24 villages in the Kurdish region beginning with Halabja. At least 5,000 people died as an immediate result of the chemical attack, and it is estimated that a further 10,000 people were injured or suffered long-term illness. Before the war ended, the Iraqis moved in on the ground and destroyed the town. In March 2010, the Iraqi High Criminal Court recognized the Halabja massacre as genocide. Saddam was executed for other crimes just before he was to be tried in Kurdistan for his acts of atrocity, and we will learn why. Today the city lives again – testimony to the Kurd's remarkable resilience and ability to survive the most brutal assault on their people and culture.

The **Halabja Museum and Memorial Cemetery**, which honors the thousands of people killed, is fascinating and moving. Visit **Byara**, which is on the Iraq/Iran border, and time permitting, stop at **Ahmed Awa**, famed for the three hikers who crossed into Iran from a nearby trail and were held in prison for several years. Return to Sulaymania, where time permitting, we can shop and wander its colorful **bazaar**, famous for its sweets, including the legendary "Manna," a chewy, white, nougat-like confection spiced with cardamom and nuts, and visit the small but famous **Zamwa art gallery**. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, October 17

Sulaymania - Erbil



Enjoy breakfast and then drive back to Erbil, stopping en route to see one of Kurdistan's most important historical sites, **Zarzi/Qizqapan Cave** (cave of the raper/abductor). The location encompasses two elements: one dating to 18,000-8000 BC and the other a Median-era tomb from around 500-300 BC. Continue to the old **Jewish city of Koysinjaq** (Koya) and visit an **old caravanserai** (hostel on the ancient Silk Road), which is currently being restored. Stop to take photos from a vantage point offering spectacular views for hundreds of miles in each direction. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant that will be taken along the way. Transfer to *Ramada Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, October 18

Erbil



Enjoy breakfast, then begin the day with a tour of the **7,000-year-old Citadel of Erbil**, the oldest continuously inhabited city on earth (there are other just cities as old but not continuously inhabited.) Erbil Citadel was once a Sumerian City called **Urbellum** or **Arbella** (4 gods), and it is believed that Abraham passed through this city on one of his journeys. It once housed the Temple of the Goddess Ishtar and was the city Darius III fled to after facing defeat by Alexander the Great on the nearby plains of Gaugamela. UNESCO is currently undertaking a massive restoration project. Tour the famous **Textile Museum**, housed in a 220-year-old residence featuring ancient Kurdish fighting tools, traditional dresses, handmade rugs from different regions and eras of Kurdish history, jewelry, and photos. In addition to Kurdish antiquities, there are several pieces from Iran and Turkey. If time permits, visit the **local bazaar (Qaysari)**. Depending on the weather, we will picnic in the largest rose garden in the Middle East- the Sami Abul Rahman Park or a famed local

eatery. The Park is one of the most revered sites in Kurdistan, housing a large memorial to over 60 of Kurdistan's leaders killed in an attack in 2004 (this included the man who built the Park, Sami Rahman, then Deputy Prime Minister).

Take a brief visit to the **Choli Minaret**, perhaps Erbil's most famous landmark (1190 - 1232 AD) and the site of a huge statue of Erbil's most renowned poet-Mudhafaria (Mu-zaffar) Al-Din Abu Sa'eed Al-Kawkaboori, a contemporary of the famed warrior Saladin. Climb into the book he holds for a photo if you want to. Return to the *Hotel* to freshen up; then, we will be invited to a farewell dinner in a local home to dine and meet some of Kurdistan's residents, including some well-known cinematography, photography, and music. Return to the *Hotel* for overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, October 19

Erbil - US



Enjoy breakfast in the morning, then transfer to the airport for your flight back to the US. **(B)**

"We reserve the right to change the order of activities/visits or sites due to unexpected events such as flight cancellations or changes of schedule, or any other reasons beyond our control. We will do our best to ensure that any necessary changes when/if needed to meet the needs of our clients".

Tour remark:

It is necessary for women to wear scarfs at religious sites such as Lalish, Churches and Mosques and men should avoid wearing shorts at these religious sites."



Tour Cost (Land Only): \$6,495.00

Per person sharing in double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$895.00

Price based on group size minimum of 4 participants and maximum of 12 participants

Trip Grade: II Lodging Level: ***



Tour includes:

- All transfers with assistance and luggage portorage.
- All accommodations mentioned in best hotels available outside of Erbil and moderate 5* in Erbil.
- Transportation within the country using modern A/C motor coach.
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary (B: Breakfast, L: Lunch and D: Dinner).
- Bottled water on the bus and with meals.
- Entrance fees to all mentioned sites and museums.
- All activities described in the tour.
- Service of a professional local guide.
- Gratuities to guides, drivers, and porters (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).

Trip Grade:

II Active – Some hikes, slightly more demanding walks at or to sites, few elevations, comfortable but busy schedule and some long rides and extensive drives.

Lodging Level:

***** Superior:** Lodges and hotels with additional amenities, refined service, and comfort level acceptable to western standards. (4 stars to 5 stars)

Tour does not include:

- International airfare in and out of Erbil.
- Kurdistan Visa (obtainable upon arrival for \$77.00 - Subject to change).
- Beverages and alcoholic drinks with or without meals.
- Items of a personal nature (camera fees, laundry, excess luggage, etc.).
- Transfers if not arriving/departing on tour dates.
- Dayroom/overnights necessitated by changes in airline schedules or misconnections.
- Trip surcharge to operate below required minimum participants.
- Travel protection insurance. (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

