

Spiekermann Travel Service Presents...

# KURDISTAN...The Other Iraq



March 03 to 10, 2018 (Post Lebanon trip)

March 24-31, 2018 (Post South Iraq Trip)

**Tour Cost: \$3,650.00 per person sharing in double**  
**Single supplement: \$450.00**

*Trip cost based on Minimum of 2 participants and maximum of 10 participants*

## Price includes

- ◆ All transfers with assistance and luggage portorage.
- ◆ Transportation within the country using modern A/C motor coach.
- ◆ All mentioned accommodations in best hotels available outside of Erbil and moderate 5\* in Erbil.
- ◆ Meals as listed (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner) and Bottled water on the bus and with meals.
- ◆ All entrance fees to visited sites (mentioned in the itinerary).
- ◆ Service of professional guide.

## Price does not include

- ◆ Airfare from USA (or From Beirut for those doing it as an extension – currently fare is \$250) and for those doing it as an extension to south Iraq, One way Baghdad to Erbil is approx.. \$150.00
- ◆ Kurdistan Visa - currently GRATIS - obtainable on arrival at border.
- ◆ Beverages with meals and meals not mentioned.
- ◆ Dayroom or extra hotel nights necessitated by airline flight schedule changes or misconnections in Europe
- ◆ Items of a personal nature, i.e. souvenirs, camera fees, laundry, phone calls, emails, etc.
- ◆ All gratuities to guides, porters, drivers, hotel and restaurant staff etc.
- ◆ Travel insurance.

***This trip is the perfect extension to our Lebanon &/or our Southern Iraq tour***

# KURDISTAN ... The Other Iraq

Kurdistan, the autonomous northern region of Iraq predominantly inhabited by the Kurds, is amazingly different from the areas populated by the Arabs. The terrain is the stark opposite of the desert that characterizes middle and southern Iraq. It is an eclectic region that offers a multitude of experiences and chance encounters. Tour the world's oldest inhabited city with its famous antique museums. Visit monasteries and churches dating from the 2nd to 4th century and the holiest sites of the Yezidis including the cave of the fire worshippers. Drive through breathtaking views of Kurdistan's mountains, rivers and waterfalls. Explore former Jewish cities and other ancient locations such as Amadiya. Shop in the local bazaars for gold, silver, carpets, spices – you name it. From the great walled city of Erbil to nearly deserted but still-functioning monasteries to gushing rivers like the Greater Zab and Lesser Zab feeding into the Tigris, the region has much to offer the seasoned traveler.

## Saturday, March 03 (or 24) Arrival Erbil

Afternoon arrival from Beirut or Baghdad and transfer to your hotel (Van Royal Hotel or similar).

## Sunday, March 04 (or 25) Erbil

Morning at leisure then head out to have lunch at one of the best local restaurants then depart for the 7000 year old Citadel of Erbil, the oldest continuously inhabited city on earth (There are 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. A massive restoration project is currently being undertaken by UNESCO. Tour the famous Textile Museum in the Citadel. The museum, housed in a 220 year old residence features 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 a number of pieces from Iran and Turkey. Women are taught on site how to weave in traditional style with a goal of preserving the ancient arts of the land. The fascinating art of felt making is also practiced on site. At the Museums gift shop you will have an opportunity to acquire a sample of local crafts. The owner of the Museum will share fascinating facts about the culture of the Kurds (depending on availability). Across from the Museum is a large and well known antique shop where one can acquire a piece of Kurdistan's history, as well as, its more modern crafts. Time permitting we will visit the local bazaar (Qaysari) where one can find jewelry, carpets and souvenirs. Dinner and then overnight at the hotel. (B,L,D)

## Monday, March 05 (or 26) Erbil to Duhok

Breakfast at hotel's main restaurant and then depart to the Dayro d-Mor Matay Monastery (St. Matthew's Monastery/ 3rd Century) for a tour conducted by the Monastery's Monks. The Monastery is one of the eastern Christendom's most famous sites and apart from a few forced closures has been in continuous use for nearly 2000 years. Depart the Monastery for Gaugamela, site of the famous battle between King Darius III and Alexander the Great. While standing on a hill overlooking the vast plain below you will enjoy a lecture about the battle and imagine the clash of arms that made Alexander King of Persia and undisputed ruler of the civilized world. Have lunch then head to see Jirwan, the oldest aqueduct and bridge ruin in the world built in 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 hundreds of miles away are inscribed with the story of this amazing feat. Here you will find the secret of the "hidden message of Sennacherib". Visit Lalish, pilgrimage site of the Yezidis who are descendants of the Zoroastrians – one of the most mysterious people in the world. Learn about the ancient rituals of this people who are considered by many to be the remnant of the original religion of Kurdistan. From here you will depart to Duhok and transfer to Dilshad Palace or similar, dinner and overnight at the hotel. (B,L,D)

## Tuesday, March 06 (or 27) Duhok to Rawanduz

A buffet breakfast will be served before departing from Duhok in the main restaurant then depart for Amadiya, an ancient city dating back at least to the Assyrian era. Located on a high promontory above a breathtaking landscape and fed by a geothermal spring originating far below the mountain, it was once an almost impenetrable fortress.

The city Gate (Bab Zebar) located in the eastern side of the city was built in 500-600 AD. Pass by a 3rd century synagogue in this once important Jewish city. Amadiya was also a center of Chaldean astrology and astronomy and local tradition holds that the Magi of Christmas fame began their journey from here. Have lunch, then depart for Rawanduz through breathtaking scenery in the region of Barzan where you will meet a local official and see the Mullah Mustapha Memorial (Father of modern Kurdistan) and continue through Soran passing by Shanidar Cave where some of the world's most important pre-historic remains were discovered – the cave was home to history's most famous Neanderthal – "Nandy". Learn what made him famous. Check into the Pank Resort Hotel or similar built and operated by Swedish Kurds and located in an idyllic valley at the foot of dramatic mountain passes. Dinner and in the evening, enjoy the facilities of the resort and overnight at the resort. (B,L,D)

## Wednesday, March 07(or28) Rawanduz to Sulaymania

Depart for Sulaymania via beautiful Lake Dokan, lunch at Kosrat restaurant in Dokan serving fine local cuisine including fresh fish from the nearby lakes and streams. Late afternoon visit to the Red House (Amna Suraka), site of many atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein at the former intelligence HQ and jail, with a tour by the Museum's Director (depending on availability). Check into Lalezar Hotel or similar, dinner at the hotel and overnight. (B,L,D)

## Thursday, March 08 (or 29) Sulaymania

Breakfast at the hotel then head to visit Sulaymania Museum of Antiquities to view Kurdistan's largest collection of artifacts dating back thousands of years. We have arranged 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 in Kurdistan's most chaotic times.

Depart for Halabja where on March 16, 1988, Saddam Hussein ordered the use of chemical weapons in attacking 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 completely 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 – learn why. Today the city lives again – testimony to the Kurds amazing resilience and ability to survive the most brutal assault on their people and culture. The Halabja Museum and Memorial Cemetery is both fascinating and moving. Back to Sulaymania and time to shop and stroll in its colorful bazaar, famous for its sweets including the original "Manna". Dinner and overnight at the hotel. (B,D)

## Friday, March 09(or 30) Sulaymania to Erbil

Depart for Erbil stopping en route at the pre-historic Qizqippan Cave (village of Zarzi) then continue on to the old Jewish city of Koisinjak (Koya) en route to Erbil. Visit an old Jewish house and Caravanserai (Hostel on the ancient Silk Road) and take photos from a vantage offering views for hundreds of miles in each direction. Check into Van Royal Hotel or similar, dinner and overnight. (B,D)

## Saturday, March 10 (or 31) Erbil to the US

Transfer to the airport for your flight back home. (B)

**We (STS) reserve the right to change hotels, restaurants or the order of activities if/as needed.**