

# Discover Iraqi Kurdistan!

Join us on an unforgettable trip to mythical Kurdistan. The Kurdistan Region is a place of beauty, hospitality and welcoming people with an extraordinary history. Discover a culture that is now opening up for tourism after a long period of conflict and war. Come to the area of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and stroll through one of the oldest citadels in the world.

Take the chance to join a picnic with locals, listen to traditional music and learn traditional Kurdish folk dances.



Come to a lovely original bazaar and experience all of the great smells and sights for your eyes in winding narrow aisles.

Learn about the culture, religion, politics, and history from experienced wise local guides who speaks Swedish/English/Kurdish.

**Discover Kurdistan** will start tours in the spring of 2014.

Our company is offering a special promotion for the first 16 travelers who sign up before January 20<sup>th</sup>. They will receive a 50% discount on our 9 days tour package.

## Tour of March 2014

The tour will be 9 days and 8 nights and we will visit some of the most interesting parts of Iraqi Kurdistan. The tour begins and ends at the Ramada hotel in Slemani.

**Discover Kurdistan** will make every tour personal for each traveler. Our guides are inspiring, educated and experienced Kurdish people that are happy to help you and answer all of your questions.

Our goal is to find the perfect balance between planned activities and your free time. Our tours are designed to give you freedom to choose how many days you would like to stay in Kurdistan. We require that all travelers book their own flights to Slemani. If you would like to stay longer, we can give you advice and assistance.

# Some High lights of the tour:

## **Hawler/Erbil**

Discover the great Citadel in Erbil – one of the oldest cities in the world where people have lived continuously for the last 8,000 years!



## **The Lalish People**

Meeting with the Lalish people in the mountains. The Lalish people belong to a religious group called the Yazidi. The Yazidi are a religious Kurdish community who represent an ancient religion that is linked to Zoroastrianism and Sufism. This religion was in the region long before Islam.

## **Mergapan**

Discover the fields of the Peshmerga (the people's army of Kurdistan) Learn about the Peshmerga by walking through battlefields and the homelands of President Talabani. Here is also a good place for some hiking.

## **Sleman/Sulemania**

Welcome to the cultural capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This city is our base where we will begin and end the tour. Here you will find a modern city with enjoyable cafés and restaurants and also a great Bazaar full of life.

## **Rawanduz**

This is one of the most beautiful regions in Kurdistan with rivers, waterfalls, canyons, and high peaks. We travel among mountains that are more than 2,000 meters high. There are many historical sites in this area. The hotel for this night is Korek Mountain Resort on top of these beautiful mountains featuring spectacular views.



### **Amna Suraka**

Visit the Amna Suraka (Red Security) museum in Slemani to remember the terrible legacy of Saddam Hussein's regime.

We visit the prison cells and torture chambers where thousands of Kurds were imprisoned, tortured, and killed.



### **Halabja**

The tour will take us to the monument of the tragedy that occurred in 1988 where thousands of Kurdish people were murdered by poisoned gas spread by Saddam's evil regime.

### **Picnic**

Enjoy a traditional Kurdish picnic in the mountains. There will be a great chance for singing, music, and dancing! The Kurdish people are world champions in picnics!

### **Price**

Price for this promotional tour March 15<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014 is 11 000 SEK.

The group will contain 8-16 travelers.

For more details, e-mail us at [discoverkurdistan@gmail.com](mailto:discoverkurdistan@gmail.com) or give us a call at 0046 70 2145994

## What is included?

- Eight nights in hotels from 3-5\*
- Prices are based on double rooms (extra for single room)
- Swedish or English speaking guides during the whole trip
- All meals when there are group activities scheduled
- Roundtrip by bus
- All entrance fees to all activities

## What is not included?

- The flight to and from Slemani
- Transfers to and from Airport
- Alcoholic drinks
- Personal snacks
- Single rooms by request
- Tip to local guides and drivers

## Practical Information

### Is it safe to travel to Iraqi Kurdistan?

Due to the security advises the Swedish Embassy warn for non-essential travel to Iraq. The Embassy do not dissuade against travel to the provinces of Dohuk, Erbil and Suleimaniye.

### Airport tax

No departure tax currently applies when leaving Iraqi Kurdistan by air.

### Local Currency

Iraqi Dinar. Up-to-date information on global exchange rates can be obtained at [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com)

### Recommended Currency for Exchange:

USD is the easiest currency to exchange. Make sure you bring sufficient cash for your trip. In Slemani and Hawler (Erbil) there are a few ATM's. Credit cards are not widely used.

### Where to Exchange:

It is relatively easy to exchange money in Iraq's larger towns and cities. However, once you are away from the main centers it can be useful to change enough money to keep you afloat until you reach the next city.

### Visa Requirements

Citizens of most of the EU, Canada and the USA are granted a free 15-day visa on arrival.

### Vaccination

There are no compulsory vaccinations required for traveling to Kurdistan. But check with your local vaccination supplier for suggestions.

## **Insurance**

Personal travel insurance is needed to take part in the tour.

## **Tips**

The currency in Kurdistan is Iraqi Dinars. There is no wide practice or expectation of tipping - it is OK to pay the price requested for a product or service, or leave some small change as a thank you.

## **Electrical sockets**

Electrical supply is 220V and plugs usually have two round pins like most European countries or three pins as in the UK. It is recommended that you take a multi-adaptor or international plug.

## **Climate**

There are quite distinct seasons in Iraqi Kurdistan, but the two extremes are winter (from Dec to Feb) and summer (from June to Aug) where the temperatures drop and rise accordingly. Spring (from Feb to May) and late September to November are particularly mild and pleasant.

## **Clothes**

### **Dress the way you like**

We encourage both men and women to dress as they would like since there are no restrictions about clothing in Iraqi Kurdistan. But people in Kurdistan do not often expose bare skin. Headscarves are not required. But scarves are sometimes required when visiting any religious sites.

## **Food**

Meat! As with many other Middle Eastern people, Kurds are meat eaters en masse. Local foods include: Kebab, *dolma* (stuffed grape vines), *yaprak* (assorted stuffed vegetables ranging from onions to courgettes, *shila u brinc* - the Kurdish national dish, which includes chicken, rice, and soup which is made from many vegetables such as okra "bamiya", and the infamous *gipa* (much like haggis).

The shawarma shops are surprisingly tasty with slices of meat served in very nice *samoon* bread - but they aren't exactly A\* cuisine. Apart from that, there are a lot of kebab or roast chicken restaurants where you will get some bread, some rice, some soup and some meat.

But there are some really nice new restaurants in the big cities where all kinds of cuisines can be found.

## **Drinks**

Bottled water is widely available. You can buy small ones (250 IQD-25 cents). They'll be sold in any small shop or markets on the street. Make sure they are sealed when you buy them. It is strongly advised not to drink tap water.

The majority of Kurdish people are Sunni Muslims, so alcohol is not sold or served just anywhere. You can find modern bars or clubs and most new restaurants serving alcohol alongside the food menu. Or you can go to any drinking lounge in hotels. There are also a lot of liquor stores. Visitors are advised to try the Kurdish "Arak" (there are many different varieties of Arak throughout the Middle Eastern

## **Passport**

Bring a passport valid at least six months after the day of your arrival.

**Bargaining**

Bargaining is welcome, but in our experience, locals are surprisingly honest when dealing with tourists or foreigners.

**Languages**

Kurdish is the official language and most widely spoken. You will be able to find people who understand basic Arabic and basic English. Also, higher learning institutes produce teenagers eager to practice their foreign language "skills". A large number of expat Kurds have returned home, bringing with them languages as diverse as Swedish and Japanese.

**Theft**

Such typical travel concerns as pickpockets, scams and theft are not common at all in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurds are extremely honest people and you'll often witness remarkable acts of trust. For example, in every town there are moneychangers who pile thousands of US Dollars, Euros, Iraqi Dinars and other currencies on a small, unprotected table on the footpath.

**Taxis**

All cities and towns in Kurdistan are best enjoyed by simply hitting the streets, going for a wander and seeing where you ending up. As a result, unless you are interested in visiting an outer suburb (such as Ainkawa in Erbil), your own two feet are your best option for moving around. But when you do need to take a taxi, they are plentiful and cheap. When traveling within a particular city or town, official taxis are either cream color or part cream/part orange and it will rarely take you more than a minute to find one. As an example of cost, in Slemani, most journeys within the city center cost 3,000 ID- 4,000ID and a trip out to one of the suburbs costs 5,000 ID. In general, you can expect to pay between 2,000 – 5,000 ID for a local taxi ride in any city or town.

**Time difference**

Standard Time is 3 hours ahead Greenwich Mean Time (GMT+3).

Iraq normally operates Daylight saving Time from 1 April until 1 October when the time is 4 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT+4).

**Mobile Phone**

Your cell phone and SIM card should work in Iraqi Kurdistan if roaming is activated. This incurs extra costs though and it may be cheaper to buy a local SIM card such as Korek or Asia Cell. Please note that your cell phone might have a SIM lock which would need to be removed before it will accept a new SIM card.



### Useful links

Kurdistan regional government's website with useful information

<http://www.krg.org/?l=12>

<http://www.henrikgothberg.wordpress.com>

a blog about Iraqi Kurdistan with text in Swedish and photos

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdistan>

more info

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-15467672>

A bbc timeline of the Kurdish history

<http://www.roadthroughkurdistan.com/>

<http://www.gokurdistan.com/>

## Welcome to join us // The team of Discover Kurdistan



### Michael Rocking

Michael has many years' experience in the travel industry and now works as the principal of one of the best tourism schools in Sweden. Michael also brews his own beer.



### Hiwa Kader

After 18 years in Sweden, Hiwa has now return back to Kurdistan. Hiwa is a well-known author in Kurdistan and he grows the best pomegranates at his farm in the mountains.



### Henrik Göthberg

Henrik is the headmaster at a folk high school in Kurdistan. Henrik is trying to learn Kurdish when he is exploring the back roads of Kurdistan.

# DISCOVER KURDISTAN

## TOUR NR 1

Date	Activity	Meals included	Hotel
Day 1	We meet in the reception of Ramada Hotel in Slemani for presentation and introduction of the tour. We eat lunch together at our hotel. After lunch we walk to the nearby Bazar and then a visit to the historical museum for a lecture about the amazing Kurdish history. At the night some local musicians will visit our group.	Lunch, Dinner	Ramada
Day 2	After a nice breakfast we head off for the mountains. We stop by at a battlefield and we hike mountains and end the day at Shaklava a city in the mountains where we find all kinds of organic produced sweets.	Breakfast, lunch, dinner	Swedish Village
Day 3	This is the big city day. We spend the day in the regions capital Hawler (Erbil). We discover one of the oldest cities in the world and we will stroll around in the old Citadel. We will visit the big Mosque, textile museum and the Bazar. There will be some free time for discovering the city on your own. At night we will be back in Shaklava and tonight there is grilled Fish on the menu.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner	Swedish Village
Day 4	Today we go deeper into the Kurdish mountains towards Rawanduz. We will hike in a beautiful gorge and there will be plenty of time for photo opportunities. The night will be spent on top of the beautiful Korek Mountain Resort at 2115 m.a.s.l. A cable car will take us to the top.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner	Korek Mountain Resort
Day 5	We start this morning with breakfast in Soran at an old traditional breakfast place with local delicacies This day will be in the breathtaking tour through the Ravanduz area. We will see gorges, and waterfalls. We drive through some historical areas and we will spend the night in Amedi, the town in the clouds on top of a mountain. A town where you can find churches, mosques and even a old	Breakfast Lunch Dinner	Hotel Amedi



	synagogue side by side.		
Day 6	Today we will meet the Lالش people that have their beliefs in an old religion that's goes back long before Islam. Lالش is the spiritual center of the ancient but little known Yezidi religion. Than we travel to a small village the tiny little village where we spend the afternoon and night together with the villagers. The old ladies in the village prepare traditional meal for us. In the evening stories from the mountains will be told to us.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner	In a small village
Day 7	Today we will visit Halabja where Saddams regime bombed with gas so 5000 people died in minutes. We will see the monument and the museum and also meet survivors from this tragedy. After a lunch we go back to Slemani for a free afternoon and than a nice dinner.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner	Hotel Ramada
Day 8	Today we will visit Amna Suraka, the torture center from the Saddam era. It is in the middle of the city and it is now turned into a museum that shows a terrible history that is just 20 years away. A guide will take us through the museum.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner	Hotel Ramada
Day 9	The last day is a good opportunity for shopping in the Bazar or some other private requests. At night we are having out last dinner together with some local musicians again. It's time to say good-bye. The tour ends here. If you would like to stay extra days we are delighted to help you with the arrangements.		