



# KORYO TOURS

## Travel Iraq - Into the Marshes, History, and Mountains



**From the marshes of Southern Iraq to the mountains of  
Iraqi Kurdistan - the historic and scenic road trip of a  
lifetime.**

*11 nights exploring Iraq, from south to north, Basra to Erbil*



## INTRODUCTION

Iraq is one of those rare places where history feels alive. Mesopotamia, Babylon, Baghdad... you may have read about it in history books. Now it's time to see the real thing.

The land between the **Tigris and Euphrates rivers**, often called the cradle of civilisation, has seen the rise and fall of empires. The birth of some of the world's oldest cities. And the shaping of stories in modern history that we still hear about today. This tour is a chance to see Iraq as it truly is.

We begin in vibrant **Basra** in southern Iraq. A city thriving from its close proximity to the sea, we will take a walk along the waterfront and through the old streets. You can even spot Saddam Hussein's old boat on the shore.

From there, we journey into the **Iraqi Marshes** for a unique experience as we stay overnight in a traditional reed house. Here, life flows as slowly as the waterways. We will taste **masgouf**, the local grilled fish, explore by boat at sunset, and enjoy an evening under the stars with the locals.

Heading north, we step into the ancient world at **Ur**. This is the site of the magnificent Ziggurat and the birthplace of Abraham. The ruins here tell a story that spans over 4,000 years. Our route continues through **Nippur**, once the religious capital of the Sumerians, before reaching **Najaf**.

In Najaf, we have the opportunity to stay with a local family. A great insight into true Iraqi hospitality! We will try our hand at cooking together for those that want to, eating, and relaxing by the river over tea and shisha.

Next up, we have the legendary city of **Babylon** and the nearby **Ziggurat of Borsippa**, often linked to the story of the Tower of Babel.

Our journey through Iraq continues in **Karbala**, where the Imam Hussein Shrine draws millions of pilgrims each year. Over 25 million in fact, giving it the title of the world's second largest pilgrimage.

In **Baghdad**, we explore both the old and new faces of the city. We will explore the historic Mutanabi Street - an area buzzing with life and full of character, known for its books and cafes. Then onto the old as we pay a visit to the famous **Iraqi National Museum**.



We will also see the beautiful turquoise teardrop-shaped Martyrs Monument at sunset for a great photo opportunity.

Further north, the tour takes us to **Samara**, with its famous spiral minaret, and the ancient city of **Ashur**, the former Assyrian capital, and **Mosul**, a city still rebuilding from the scars of recent conflicts. Finally, we pay a visit to the welcoming Christian city of **Baghdida**.

Our journey ends in **Iraqi Kurdistan**. Moving from incredible history to stunning landscapes, our road trip takes us alongside rugged mountains and green valleys. We visit the sacred Yazidi site of **Lalish**, travel through the dramatic **Rawanduz Valley**, and finish in **Erbil**. One of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world - and the perfect way to end our trip.

*Note: If you'd like to spend more time exploring Iraqi Kurdistan, let us know. We can assist in creating an Iraqi Kurdistan add-on private tour.*

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Sumerian Marshes Overnight** | Spend a night under the stars and amongst the buffalo as we stay in traditional reed huts, and enjoy local food of fish and buffalo cheese, and live the local life.
- **Babylon & Saddam Hussein's Palace** | Explore one of the most important cities in the world, and have a look inside Saddam's palace overlooking Babylon.
- **Federal Iraq & Iraqi Kurdistan** | Two very different places. Extreme history and extreme nature. All in one trip!

## INCLUSIONS

- All accommodation in Iraq.
- Iraq visa support.
- Local Iraqi tour guide.
- Expert Koryo Tours tour leader.
- All transportation within Iraq
- All entrance tickets and activities listed.
- All meals.
- Water throughout the day.



## EXCLUSIONS

- Travel to Iraq.
- Iraq visa.
- Travel insurance (mandatory).
- Tips for local guides.
- Souvenirs.
- Extra drinks/snacks.
- Single supplement rooming (50 USD per night)

## NOTES

For the Iraq visa, you may be eligible for the Visa on Arrival scheme.

For those not eligible for visa on arrival, we will provide supporting documents and help you make the visa application. The visa (including for VOA) ranges from \$160-190 USD.

On this trip, we aim to see as much as possible in a very short amount of time. Iraq has a lot of history on offer, so of course we want to make the most out of this trip. Because of that, the days may be long and it involves a lot of driving as we make our way from south to north.



## ITINERARY

### DAY 1 | January 22 | Thursday

## Arrival Day in Basra

Arrival in Iraq's third-largest city

- Arrive at **Basra International Airport** (BSR) from major hubs in the Middle East or Istanbul.
- Your driver will wait for you at the airport to pick you up for a transfer to our hotel.
- Check in at the hotel.

### Welcome Dinner

- We will gather for a welcome dinner and also take a walk on the award-winning **Basra Waterfront Coronation**.

**Accommodation** | Hotel in Basra

**Included Meals** | Dinner

### DAY 2 | January 23 | Friday

## Basra Day Tour & Marshes

### Basra Tour

- Day tour in the old city of Basra.
- **Basra** | This is the main southern city and its largest port. It has long been a gateway for trade, culture, and ideas. Basra is also known for its canals lined with date palms!
- **Basra Museum** | A look into the history of Basra and the surrounding areas. It used to be Saddam's Palace.
- **Tiger & Euphrates River** | We will take a drive to the meeting point of the Tiger and the Euphrates River.
- **Adam's tree** | This is considered to be the Garden of Eden.

### Marshes



- Travel to the Marshes, where we will have a late lunch of **Masquf**, the **Sumerian local fish** (vegetarian option available).
- **Marshes** | A UNESCO-listed wetland where life has changed little over millennia. The Marsh Arabs still live in traditional reed houses and travel by narrow boats along the waterways.
- **Boat Trip in the Marshes** | We take a boat trip for sunset, where we will go to a local Samarian-designed house in the middle of the marshes to spend the night.
- **Night in the Marshes** | Enjoy an evening amongst the marshes where we have snacks and a light dinner around the fire. We will have a fun evening of local music surrounded by nature.

**Accommodation** | Samarian Style local accommodation in the marshes. *NB: This accommodation features local-style sleeping arrangements and is not a hotel. Amenities such as toiletries are not provided, but the experience makes up for it!*

**Included Meals** | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### DAY 3 | January 24 | Saturday

## City of Ur and Najaf

### Marshes to Najaf

- Local Sumerian breakfast of buffalo's cream and milk. After this, we will begin our drive north.
- **City of Ur** | Visit the ancient city of **Ur**, where we will see the ancient **Ziggurat** and the **House of the Prophet Abraham**. This 4,000-year-old city was once one of the most important Sumerian settlements. The Ziggurat of Ur, a massive stepped structure dominating the otherwise flat landscapes. According to tradition, this is the birthplace of Abraham.
- **City of Nippur** | Nippur was the religious capital of the Sumerians and one of the oldest cities in Mesopotamia. It was dedicated to Enlil, one of the chief deities in the Sumerian pantheon, and served as a major religious centre during the 3rd millennium BCE.
- Continue driving to the city of **Najaf**, where we will spend the night at a local homestay.

**Accommodation** | Homestay in Najaf

**Included Meals** | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 4 | January 25 | Sunday

## Najaf

### Najaf City Tour

- **Old City** | Explore Najaf and Najaf's Old City, one of the most important cities in the Shia Muslim world.
- **Wadi al Salam** | We pay a visit to the **largest cemetery in the world** - Wadi al Salam. Meaning "Valley of Peace," it is located in Najaf and is the largest cemetery in the world. It has been a burial site for over 1,400 years.
- We then take a trip to the market where we can buy local clothes and Abayas, as well as lots of other souvenirs. You'll need this local attire to enter the shrine.
- **Imam Ali Shrine** | The Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf is the burial site of Imam Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and the first Imam in Shia Islam. The shrine is one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Shia Muslims. The golden dome of the Imam Ali Shrine draws pilgrims from across the globe. We will take a look inside the separated female/male sections, and you'll truly be astounded by the colours, lights, and decorations from this fantastic piece of architecture.
- **Homestay & Cooking Class** | Return to our homestay for a cooking class where we will prepare and eat our lunch prepared by ourselves.
- **Private River Chalet** | Enjoy an afternoon of relaxation Iraq-style: with shisha, tea, and snacks in front of the river in our private rented chalet, including swimming pool.
- Return to our homestay for the evening.

**Accommodation | Homestay in Najaf**

**Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

DAY 5 | January 26 | Monday

## Babylon and Karbala

### Najaf to Karbala

- **Kufa Mosque** | Start the day by going to **Kufa Mosque**, the fourth-holiest place for Shia Muslims. It has historical and religious significance due to its association



with Imam Ali and early Islamic history.

- **Ezekiel Tomb** | Visit the Ezekiel Tomb, where we will see old Hebrew writings. This town used to be shared between Jews and Muslims. It is believed to be the burial place of the biblical prophet Ezekiel, and the tomb is inscribed with Hebrew writings.
- **Daniel's Market** | Explore the old market next to Ezekiel Tomb, called Daniel's market.
- **Ziggurat of Borsipa** | Visit the Ziggurat of Borsipa, which is believed by many to be the Tower of Babel.
- Lunch at a local farm.

#### BABYLON

- **Ancient City of Babylon** | Babylon was one of the most important cities of ancient Mesopotamia, known for its role as the capital of Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar II. It is associated with significant cultural achievements, including the Code of Hammurabi and the **Hanging Gardens of Babylon**, one of the **Seven Wonders of the Ancient World**.
- **Saddam's Palace** | Pay a visit to Saddam's Palace and see the last remnant from his regime. From here, enjoy a great view of the ancient city.
- Drive to Karbala.

#### Karbala

- Karbala is a holy city for Shia Muslims and the site of the shrine of Imam Hussein. It is the focal point of the Arbaeen pilgrimage, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world.

**Accommodation | Hotel in Karbala**

**Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

#### DAY 6 | January 27 | Tuesday

## Karbala and Baghdad

#### Karbala to Baghdad

- **Imam Hussein's Shrine** | Visit Imam Hussein's shrine. Here, you will learn why it is one of the most important cities in Iraq, religiously, with the largest annual





gathering in the world. The shrine of Imam Hussein in Karbala marks the burial place of the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, who was martyred at the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE.

- **Ctesiphon** | Drive to **Ctesiphon** (Taq kisra), the second largest single-span unreinforced brickwork vault in the world. See the panoramic view from a building next to it that is abandoned. It was the capital of the Parthian and Sassanian empires.
- Drive to Baghdad.
- Enjoy an evening walk and dinner in front of the Tiger River.

**Accommodation | Hotel in Baghdad**

**Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

**DAY 7 | January 28 | Wednesday**

## Baghdad

**Baghdad City Tour**

- **Iraqi National Museum** | Visit the Iraqi National Museum to get introduced to Iraqi culture and history throughout the years. The Iraqi National Museum houses a vast collection of artefacts from Mesopotamian civilisations, including Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian relics. It is considered one of the most important museums in the Middle East.
- **Mutanabi Street** | Explore the old part of Baghdad. We will go to Mutanabi Street, known as the Book Street, the antique market, and the old copper market. It is named after the 10th-century poet Al-Mutanabi.
- **Mustansiriya School** | We will also visit Mustansiriya School, one of the oldest remaining schools in the world. The Mustansiriya Madrasa was established in the 13th century. It served as an important educational institution during the Abbasid era.
- **Martyrs Monument** | Go for sunset to the Martyrs Monument. The Martyrs Monument in Baghdad is a large blue-domed structure built in the 1980s to commemorate Iraqis who died in past wars. It is a symbol of national remembrance.
- Dinner in the new part of Baghdad.

**Accommodation | Hotel in Baghdad**



**Included Meals** | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**DAY 8 | January 29 | Thursday**

## Samara & Ashur

**Baghdad to Mosul**

- Depart from Baghdad north to Samara.
- **The Great Mosque of Samara** | Built in the 9th century, it is famous for its spiral minaret, known as the Malwiya Tower. The structure is one of the most distinctive examples of Abbasid architecture. It used to be the largest in the world at its time.
- Continue our way north and have lunch and a break.
- Travel to the ancient city of Ashur.
- **Ashur** | Ashur was the first capital of the Assyrian Empire and a significant religious centre. Its ruins, including temples and palace foundations, are a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This was the capital of the Assyrians and one of the oldest cities in human history.
- Continue our drive to Mosul.

**Accommodation** | Hotel in Mosul

**Included Meals** | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

**DAY 9 | January 30 | Friday**

## Mosul & Baghdida

**Baghdida**

- **Mosul City Tour** | Start the day with a tour in the old city of Mosul, where we will see a lot of destruction from the time of ISIS, including churches, mosques, and old neighbourhoods. We will also see the Hidba Minaret, which is the icon of Mosul. This was destroyed by ISIS and rebuilt by UNESCO.
- **Nori Mosque** | Where they announced the Islamic caliphate by Abu Bakal al Baghdadi.



- **Baghdida** | We visit one of the last Christian communities in Iraq, the Town of Baghdida, where we will visit Tahira Chuch, which used to be the largest church in the Middle East in the 1940s.
- We will spend the evening in one of the local bars, having local liquor and a small party and spending the night in the town.

**Accommodation | Hotel in Baghdida**

**Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

**DAY 10 | January 31 | Saturday**

## Bashiqa & Iraqi Kurdistan

**Exploring Yazidi Religion**

- **Bashiqa** | Today we travel to the city of Bashiqa, home to Yazidis, Christians, and Muslims, where we will be able to see Yazidi temples. The town is famous for local Araq and beer.
- We will continue our drive into Iraqi Kurdistan.

**Iraqi Kurdistan**

- **Lalish** | Drive to Lalish, the holiest place for the **Yazidi** religion in the middle of the mountains. The temple complex, located in a mountain valley, is a pilgrimage destination for Yazidis worldwide.
- Continue driving to the valley of **Rawanduz**, one of the most scenic places in Iraq.
- **Rawanduz** | The Rawanduz Valley in Iraqi Kurdistan is famous for its dramatic gorges, mountains, and scenic landscapes. It is a popular location for hiking and photography.
- We will spend the night in a hotel overlooking the valley.

**Accommodation | Hotel in Rawanduz**

**Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

**DAY 11 | February 1 | Sunday**

## Erbil



### Rawanduz to Erbil

- Enjoy the morning in Rawanduz.
- **Shaqlawa** | Go to Shaqlawa, a beautiful town on the way to Erbil. Shaqlawa is a small town in Iraqi Kurdistan known for its fruit orchards, cool climate, and traditional markets.
- Drive to Erbil city.

### ERBIL

- **Erbil Citadel** | We will go to the market that is next to Erbil Citadel, one of the oldest continuously inhabited places in the world. A UNESCO World Heritage Site. The citadel dominates the centre of Erbil and is surrounded by traditional markets and cafes.
- Enjoy an evening in the market's local cafe overlooking the main square of Erbil and the market.

### Accommodation | Hotel in Erbil

**Included Meals** | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### DAY 12 | February 2 | Monday

## Departure from Iraq

### Flight Departures from Erbil Airport

- You will be transferred to Erbil International Airport.
- Departure from **Erbil International Airport** (EBL) throughout the day. Erbil is well connected to major Middle Eastern hubs, Istanbul, and select European cities.

**Included Meals** | Breakfast