

Black Sea Coast & the Kaçkar Mountains



Admit it – you forgot Turkey has a northern coast. Fair enough, the might of the Med often overshadows the simpler pleasures of the less-popular Black Sea, and if it's just sun, sea and sand you want, you couldn't be blamed for heading south rather than trying to hit the all-too-brief swimming season here. Luckily, there's far more to the Karadeniz (Black Sea) than a tourist industry, and discerning travellers can explore a wealth of sights without a sniff of the crowds that plague the real resort regions.

Of course, the defining feature of this coast is still the sea, but Black Sea dwellers enjoy it in an altogether civilised manner, seeking out the best spots to dig into a catch-fresh fish dinner or sup a cup of local tea amid the crumbling remnants of a past every bit as colourful as central Anatolia's. Fragments of castles and fortifications litter the coastline – legacies of the kings of Pontus, or the Genoese, or the Ottomans, or whoever got hold of them last. Recent history, too, has marked the region, which acted willingly as the flashpoint for Atatürk's republican revolution.

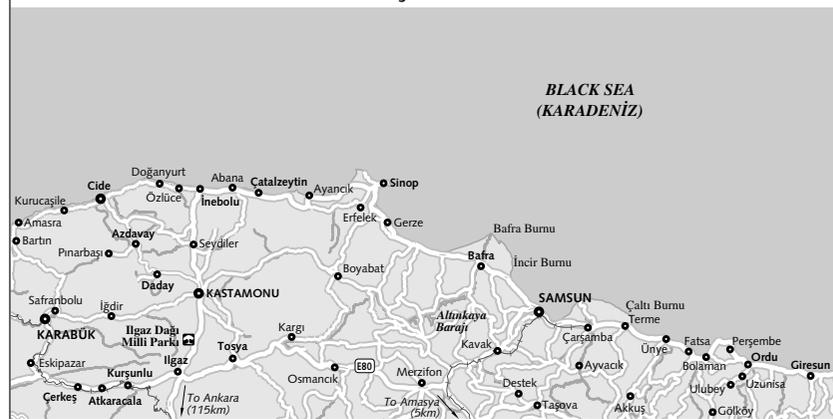
At the far eastern end of the coast, just before you have to turn round or dive into Georgia, lies the Black Sea's other trump card, the scenic Kaçkar Mountains. The trekking season's even shorter than the beach period, but you still have a four-month window around summer to explore isolated mountain villages, field-test hearty mountain food and experience some fading mountain cultures. And trust us, once you've done all that, there's no risk you'll forget Turkey's north coast again.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Admire Byzantine frescoes in an impossible cliff-face setting at the **Sumela Monastery** (p554)
- Trek the peaks to sample local dishes and village hospitality in the **Kaçkar Mountains** (p558)
- Road-test the first wave of mountain eco-tourism in **Çamlıhemşin** (p560)
- Twist and turn scenically on the long and winding coast road between attractive **Amasra** and seductive **Sinop** (p539)
- Hustle, bustle, taste, test, shop, drop and sightsee in busy-busy **Trabzon** (p548)



BLACK SEA COAST & THE KAÇKAR MOUNTAINS



History

The coast was colonised in the 8th century BC by Milesians and Arcadians, who founded towns at Sinop, Samsun and Trabzon. Later it became the Kingdom of Pontus. The most famous Pontic king, Mithridates VI Eupator, waged a war against the Romans in 88 to 84 BC and conquered Cappadocia and other Anatolian kingdoms, but was later forced to agree a peace based on pre-war borders.

From 74 to 64 BC he was at it again, this time encouraging his son-in-law, Tigranes I of Armenia, to grab Cappadocia from the Romans. The Roman response was to conquer Pontus, whereupon Mithridates was forced to flee; he later committed suicide. The Romans left a small kingdom of Pontus at the far eastern end of the coast, based in Trebizond (Trabzon).

The coast was subsequently ruled by Byzantium, and Alexius Comnenus, son of Emperor Manuel I, proclaimed himself emperor of Pontus when the crusaders sacked Constantinople and drove him out in AD 1204. His descendants ruled this small empire until 1461, when it was captured by the Ottomans under Mehmet the Conqueror.

While Alexius remained in Trabzon, Samsun was under Seljuk rule and the Genoese had trading privileges. But when the Ottomans came, the Genoese burned Samsun to the ground and sailed away.

After WWI the Ottoman Greek citizens of this region attempted to form a new Pontic state with Allied support. Disarmed by the

Allied occupation authorities, Turkish inhabitants were persecuted by ethnic Greek guerrilla bands who had been allowed to keep their arms. In these circumstances, the Turks proved very responsive to calls for revolution. Using a bureaucratic ruse, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) escaped the sultan's control in Istanbul and landed at Samsun on 19 May 1919. He soon moved inland to Amasya and began to organise Turkey's battle for independence.

Climate

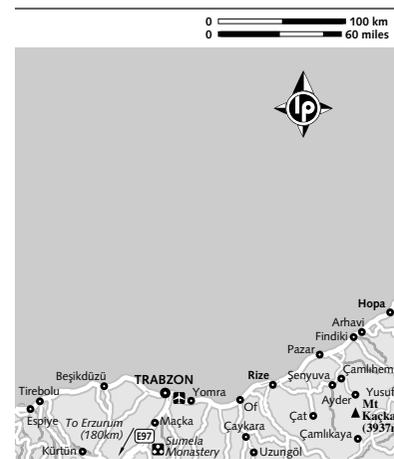
The Black Sea coast receives the heaviest rainfall in Turkey. The damp climate of this long stretch of land is characterised by warm, showery summers and mild, rainy and foggy winters with moderate temperatures. Spring and autumn bring generally changeable conditions. In the Kaçkar winters are long, harsh and snowy. Be prepared for unpredictable weather because of the altitude.

AMASRA

☎ 0378 / pop 6400

Coming from the west, Amasra is the first town of any real note along the Black Sea coast, and has a good claim to be one of the prettiest, squeezed neatly between two harbours and a sandy beach and overlooked by a thick-walled citadel. It's a popular tourist centre for this region, but has still been spared the kind of overdevelopment it might have suffered were it on the Aegean.

The Byzantines held Amasra as part of the Pontic kingdom, but rented the port to the



Genoese as a trading station from 1270 until 1460, when Mehmet the Conqueror walked in without a fight. Under Ottoman rule, Amasra lost its commercial importance to other Black Sea ports, and today it's simply a perfect spot to relax and enjoy some summer waterlife.

Orientation

As you come into Amasra, you'll pass the museum in an old stone building on the left, and a couple of pensions. Most of the buses stop at an intersection right by the PTT. Follow the sign to 'Şehir Merkezi' (north) for the Küçük Liman (Small Harbour) with restaurants, pensions and the *belediye* (town hall), or walk straight (east) until you hit the sandy strip of the Büyük Liman (Large Harbour).

The entrance to the citadel lurks amid the souvenir shops in the Küçük Liman.

Information

Amasra Turizm (☎ 315 1978; www.amasraturizm.com; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 13) Hotel bookings, car hire and local tourist services.

Café 5 (Özdemirhan Sokak; per hr €0.75; ☎ 9am-midnight) Internet access and phone services.

Tourist information (☎ 315 1219; Atatürk Kültür Parkı; ☎ 11am-7pm) Erratic opening hours, no English spoken.

Sights & Activities

North of the two harbours, three massive gateways lead to the **kale** (citadel), Amasra's most striking feature. It encompasses the promontory fortified by the Byzantines

when this small commercial port was known as Sesamos Amastris.

Most of the area inside the citadel is now residential; most of the original walls survive and there are a few old relics such as the 15th-century **Eski Chapel** (Old Chapel), now a cultural centre. Make your way to the northeastern outcrop to sip tea and soak up sunset views of a noisy seagull colony on an offshore islet.

The **Amasra Museum** (Amasra Müzesi; ☎ 315 1006; Dereoğlu Sokak 4; admission €1.10; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun), overlooking Küçük Liman, contains a standard collection of Roman, Byzantine and Hellenistic odds and ends, including some impressive statues from the 2nd century.

Amasra's magnificent location is best admired from the sea. In season, several operators in Büyük Liman offer **boat trips** in the harbour and along the coastline. Expect to pay about €3 for a short tour (45 minutes) and €15 for a longer tour (six hours).

Sleeping

Rates in Amasra can rise by 10% to 40% on busy summer weekends; prices quoted here are for midweek. If you're planning to visit out of season, be warned that many places close at the end of October and don't open again until May at the earliest.

Amasra is also a good spot for *ev pansiyons* (pensions in private homes), which are worthwhile options for budget travellers. You'll find some along the seafront and a handful within the castle walls; look out for the signposts or '*Pansiyon*' notices in individual windows.

Kale Pansiyon (☎ 315 1251; Topçyanı Sokak; d €17) A good home pension in the citadel area, *deniz manzaralı* (with sea view) and boasting a shady terrace. Plain rooms come with poky private bathrooms.

Balkaya Pansiyon (☎ 315 1434; İskele Caddesi 35; s/d €10/20) The cheapest formal pension in town, offering small, basic rooms on a side street between the harbours.

Kuşna Pansiyon (☎ 315 1033; Kuşna Sokak 36; d €24) Run by the same people as the Karadeniz Aile Pide Salonu (see p538), this castle option is that bit nicer than your average *ev pansiyonu*, with six bright, colourful rooms surrounded by a verdant garden. Breakfast not included.

Şahil Otel (☎ 315 2211; Turgut Işık Caddesi 82; s/d €17/34) Opposite the local sailing club on the Büyük Liman, this is a small but smart modern option with sea-facing balconies offering some perfect beach views.

Timur Otel (☎ 315 2589; oteltimur@ttnet.net.tr; Çekiciler Caddesi 27; s/d/tr €17/34/42) The Timur, slap-bang in the centre, has bright, pleasantly furnished rooms, double-glazing and 'pathogen-free' bathrooms, though no sea aspect. Unusually, prices actually fall at weekends.

Camcıoğlu Otel Bedesten (☎ 315 1938; Celal Eyiceoğlu Caddesi 8; s/d/tr €17/34/42) A rather bizarre option occupying the top floors of a half-empty shopping centre, with reception shared by the Metro bus office, the Bedesten nevertheless has good-standard rooms with new fittings and an attractive restaurant. Be sure to ask for outside-facing windows.

Hotel Türkili (☎ 315 3750; www.turkili.com.tr; Özdemirhan Sokak 6; s/d €23/36) Behind the wrought-iron balconies and blackcurrant-pink façade, you'll find creature comforts galore at this excellent Amasra favourite. Good English is spoken, the rooftop restaurant gets views across both harbours, and there are some big suite-like corner rooms (€67).

Büyük Liman Otel (☎ 315 3900; Turgut Işık Caddesi; s/d €20/39) In an excellent location on the harbour road, this well-run place offers attractive rooms with lots of front balconies facing the beach. The hotel and its Veneto café-restaurant are both particularly popular at weekends.

Amastris Hotel (☎ 315 3700; www.amastrisotel.com; Cumhuriyet Meydanı; s/d €36/72; 🚗) It's not quite the top-end option it thinks it is, but the pool and palm trees do add a resort flavour and the upper-level rooms are almost worth the money. Views take in the harbour and the military barracks next door, and the Bofe Bar is one of the livelier nightspots in town.

Eating

Amasra has several pleasant, licensed seafront restaurants serving superb *canlı balık* (fresh fish) by the portion (three-portion deals usually available for groups). In the high season, they're often full of coach parties.

Karadeniz Aile Pide Salonu (☎ 315 1543; Mustafa Çengiz Caddesi 9; mains €1.10-3; 🕒 9am-9pm) One of a row of streetside places south of the *belediye* in Küçük Liman, you can't go wrong with pide (Turkish-style pizza) or *çorba* (soup) here.

Sormagir Café (☎ 315 3404; Küçük Liman Caddesi 24; mains €1.10-3; 🕒 9am-9pm) At the castle entrance, opposite Amasra's tiny 'pub quarter', the family-run Sormagir serves up the best *gözleme* (savoury pancake) in town in its cosy 1st-floor salon.

Hamam Café (☎ 378 3878; Tarihi Sağlık Osmanlar Hamamı; mains €1.10-4) As you'd expect from the name, this café occupies the historic old *hamam* (bath-house) off the seafront, offering a terrace and Ottoman-styled lounge for drinks, traditional meals and nargilehs (water pipes).

Amasra Sofrası (☎ 315 2483; G Mithat Ceylan Caddesi; mains €2-4.50; 🕒 9am-10pm) Right in the centre of town, midway between the two harbours, this is Amasra's prime grill and fast-food spot, with plenty of chicken dishes.

Çınar Restaurant (☎ 315 1018; Küçük Liman Caddesi 1; mains €3-6; 🕒 11am-11pm) One of several places providing the fresh fish dinners that help sell the town to visitors; set your sights on the rear terrace, just above the water. It's right by the Küçük Liman, near the *belediye*.

Çesm-i Cihan Restaurant (☎ 315 1062; Büyük Liman; mains €3-8; 🕒 11am-11pm) Fulfilling the same role on the busier Büyük Liman, this multistorey traditional-style house hits all the right charm buttons. *Levrek* (bass) and *istavrit* (mackerel) are regulars on the menu, served with copious salad.

Mustafa Amca'nın Yeri (☎ 315 2606; Küçük Liman Caddesi; mains €4-8.50; 🕒 11am-11pm) Amasra's smartest seafood choice, established in 1945, is a favourite with tour groups and locals alike, arguably in spite of the OTT aquatic décor. Go early to bag a waterside table.

Drinking & Entertainment

Amasra Belediyesi Aile Çay Bahçesi (Küçük Liman) The municipality tea garden is a delightfully shady social hub in a prime location.

Ağlayan Ağaç Çay Bahçesi (Nöbethane Sokak) Head up the streets within the *kale* to find this perfect panoramic sipping spot – a handful of signs point the way.

Teras Cafe & Bar (☎ 315 2046; Turgut Işık Caddesi) Right on the beach by the Büyük Liman, Teras makes itself even more indispensable by blocking the views of the rival joints behind it, so it really is hard to beat for a waterfront beer.

Han Bar (☎ 315 2775; Küçük Liman Caddesi 17) This is the main emissary of Amasra's small cluster of pubs, a hut-like wooden building sandwiched between houses opposite the castle walls. There's usually *canlı musik* (live music) at night.

Getting There & Away

If you plan to travel east along the coast from Amasra, start early in the morning. Minibuses

DETOUR TO BARTIN

Strictly speaking it's not on the coast, but as you'll probably have to pass through it anyway on your way to/from Ankara or Safranbolu, you may as well throw in a quick stop at Bartın, 15km southwest of Amasra on Hwy 755. It's a charming town set amid the typically hilly landscape that separates the Black Sea from the plains of Anatolia. Numerous old wooden houses are scattered around the centre; most are pretty rundown but some have been renovated, and you can expect more to follow as the Ottoman revival continues. Who knows, if someone has the vision to open a hotel or two, the town may even start to rival Amasra as an appealing overnight and local base...

become increasingly difficult to find as the day wears on.

Big intercity bus companies don't operate to Amasra. Instead, minibuses to Bartın (€0.15, 30 minutes) leave about every 40 minutes from near the intersection by the PTT. From Bartın you can catch regular buses to Safranbolu (€5, two hours), Ankara (€14, five hours) and İstanbul (€20, seven hours).

AMASRA TO SİNOP

Winding round the rugged hills that hug the Black Sea coastline, the wonderfully scenic road from Amasra east to Sinop (312km) should be on every traveller's itinerary, whether you're a driver, cyclist or passenger. The switchback curves afford stunning views at every turn, and it's not a major route so you won't often encounter much traffic. The flipside is that it's narrow and slow going (average speed is 40km/h to 50km/h, taking seven or eight hours to Sinop), with the road surface often broken and the occasional *heyelan* (landslide) to hinder progress. If you want to get about by public transport, you'll have to pick up local services between the many tiny towns along the way – start early in the morning! If you're really lucky you may catch one of the rare daily bus services from İstanbul.

Quite a few villages here have camp sites and with your own wheels the coast is your lobster: simply stop wherever you like what you see. Starting out west to east, a swim at **Bozköy beach**, west of Çakraz, is a fine start, or drop in to see the boat-builders at work in the

town of **Kurucaşile**, 45km east of Amasra. Both towns have modest hotels and pensions.

The picturesque village of **Kapisuyu**, with its two beaches, is another good spot to break your journey, and the tiny harbour on the perfect cove at **Gideros** is idyllic.

About 63km east of Amasra the road descends to a broad, sand-and-pebble beach that stretches for several kilometres to the aptly named village of **Kumluca** (Sandy). The beach continues 8km eastward to **Cide**, a small town where many *dolmuş* (minibus) services terminate. If you're stuck overnight, the **Yalı Otel** (☎ 0366-866 2087; www.yaliozel.com; Liman Yolu; s/d €9/18) is good value and has an on-site restaurant.

Leaving Cide, there's a panoramic viewpoint by the flagpole on the ridge above town. Around 12km on is **Kuscu Köyü**, a small village that gives access to the **Aydos Canyon**, a steep river ravine leading from the interior.

Further east, as you pass through the village of **Denizkonak**, look out for the semicollapsed mosque, left by subsidence at an angle that would terrify the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Doğanıyurt, 31km before İnebolu, is yet another pleasant harbour town, while **Abana**, 9km further east, is a fast-growing resort with a decent beach.

Over halfway to Sinop, **İnebolu** is another handy stopping point, especially as you may not be able to find onward transport by late afternoon. The **Yakamoz Tatil Köyü** (☎ 0366-811 3100; www.yakamoztatilkoyu.com, in Turkish; İsmetpaşa Caddesi; r €25-78; 🚗), a small resort complex about 800m west of the centre, provides varied accommodation, a restaurant (mains €3 to €9), bar, café and a pebble beach. In the centre of town, be sure to have a look at the clutch of old Ottoman houses scattered around, and note the big restored mansion where Atatürk slept once in 1925.

About 41km east of İnebolu, near **Çatalzeytin**, there is a long pebble beach surrounded by beautiful scenery. At **Ayanak** the road divides, with the left (northern) fork offering the more scenic route to Sinop, about 2½ hours from İnebolu. There are numerous lakes and caves around here.

SİNOP

☎ 0368 / pop 101,000

Sinop, on a promontory jutting into the Black Sea, is a natural site for a port and has been one for a thousand years. Today it's a popular destination for holidaymakers from İstanbul

LIKE A VIRGIN

Sinop takes its name from the legend of Sinope, daughter of the river god Asopus. Zeus fell in love with her and, in an attempt to buy her affections, promised to grant her any wish. Sinope, who had no intention of letting herself be seduced even by the king of the gods, promptly asked for eternal virginity. Outwitted, Zeus gave in gracefully, and allowed Sinope to live out her days in happy (and celibate) solitude at the tip of the peninsula.

and Ankara, and apparently for model-ship enthusiasts, who are spoilt for choice in the many model shops. While it has little to offer in terms of sights, it's a great Black Sea base, and most visitors find its laid-back charm, wining and dining options amenable to say the least.

History

Colonised from Miletus in the 8th century BC, Sinop's trade slowly grew, and successive rulers – Cimmerians, Phrygians, Persians, the Pontic kings (who made it their capital), Romans and Byzantines – turned it into a busy trading centre.

The Seljuks used Sinop as a port after taking it in 1214, but the Ottomans preferred to develop Samsun, which had better land communications.

On 30 November 1853, a Russian armada attacked Sinop without any warning, overwhelming the local garrison and inflicting great loss of life. The battle hastened the beginning of the Crimean War, in which the Ottomans allied with the British and French to fight Russian ambitions in the Near East.

Orientation

Sinop is at the narrow point of the peninsula, with the road continuing east beyond the town to beaches and land's end. The otogar (bus station) is at the western entrance to the town by the fortified walls. From here the unattractive main street, Sakarya Caddesi, cuts east through the centre 800m directly to the Sinop *vilayet konağı* (provincial government headquarters).

Information

Hit Café Internet (Gazi Caddesi; per hr €0.55;

☎ 10am-midnight)

Tourist information (☎ 261 5298; Gazi Caddesi; ☎ 8.30am-5pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep) Very friendly, helpful office with English-speaking female staff. There's a secondary booth by the otogar.

Sights & Activities

Sinop's prime attraction is the relatively well-preserved **fortifications**. Open to attack from the sea, Sinop seems to have been fortified even since 2000 BC, but the existing walls are developments of those originally erected in 72 BC by Pontic King Mithridates IV. At one time the walls, some 3m thick, were more than 2km long, with seven gates, and towers 25m high. You can still walk along the ramparts in places to look out over the sea or back towards the distant mirage-like hills.

Near the shore on the northern side of the otogar is an ancient bastion called the **Kumkapı** (Sand Gate); on the southern side you can visit the **Tarihi Cezaevi** (Old Jail; admission €0.85; ☎ 9am-6pm), a hulking former prison block with most of its walled complex intact. Another square tower looms above the harbour nearby.

Sinop's **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 261 1975; Okullar Caddesi; admission €1.10; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun) is one of the better institutions along the coast – after all, how many local museums can boast their own excavation site next door? Apart from the Temple of Serapis dig, displays cover the classical, Byzantine and Ottoman periods, and there's an Ottoman tomb in the open garden.

In the town centre on Sakarya Caddesi stands the **Aladdin Camii** (1267), also called the Ulu Cami, a mosque set in a wide walled courtyard. It was constructed for Muinettin Süleyman Pervane, a powerful Seljuk grand vizier. The mosque has been repaired many times; its marble *mihrab* (the niche indicating the direction of Mecca) and *mimber* (pulpit) were added by the local Candaroğlu emir.

Next to it is the **Pervane Medresesi** (Pervane Seminary), built by Süleyman Pervane in 1262 to commemorate the second conquest of Sinop. It's now full of shops selling crafts and local products.

Near the harbour is the **Tersane Hacı Ömer Camii** (1903) with, next to it, a touching monument, the Şehitler Çeşmesi (Martyrs' Fountain), built in memory of the many Turkish soldiers who died in the surprise Russian attack of 1853. The fountain was built using the money recovered from the soldiers' pockets.

Sinope Tours (☎ 261 7900; www.sinopetours.com; Kıbrıs Caddesi 3) runs daily city and local tours.

Sleeping

Yılmaz Aile Pansiyonu (☎ 261 5752; Tersane Çarşısı 11; s/d/tr €8.50/17/23) Great value for a budget price, these plain but neat rooms have TVs and individual boilers for the showers. Quite a few have views, and room 47 in particular is a nice bright triple with balcony. Room 46, on the other hand, appears to be missing entirely! Breakfast not included.

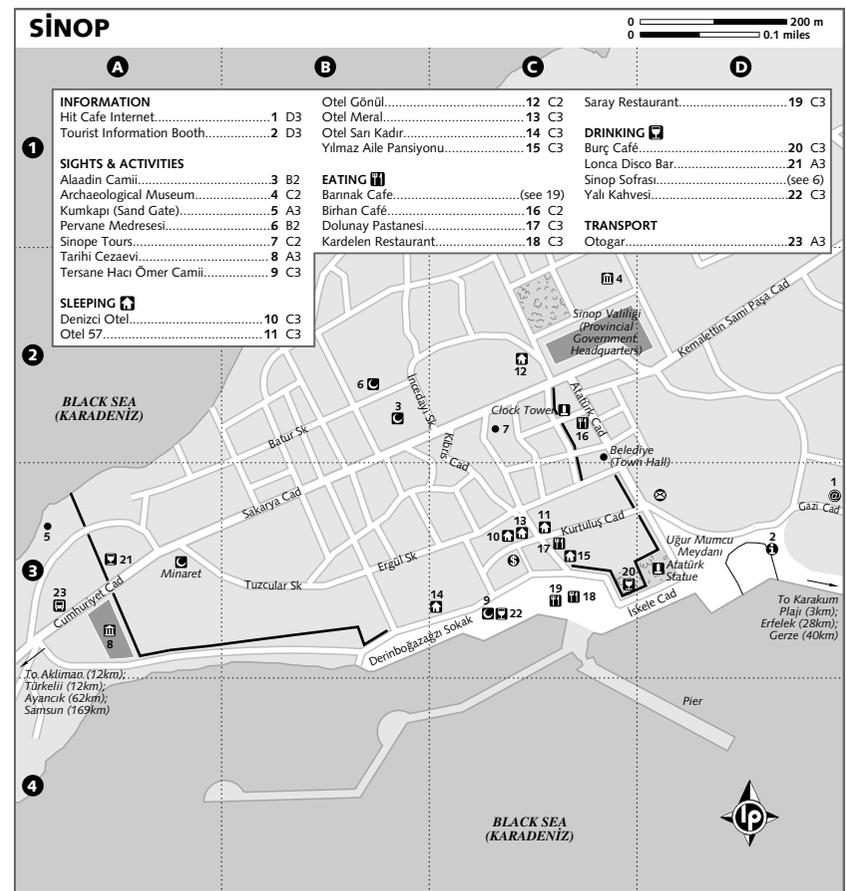
Otel Meral (☎ 261 3100; Kurtuluş Caddesi 19; s/d/tr/q €11/20/22/34) The hearts on the bedspreads merit a quick 'aww', but you might not be so impressed with the bathrooms – some are shared, and even some of the private showers are missing their heads. Still, if it's budget you want this'll do.

Otel 57 (☎ 261 5462; otel57@hotmail.com; Kurtuluş Caddesi 29; s/d €17/22) Amazing what you can get

for those extra few euros: digital TV, in-house bar, balconies and big butch, beefy shower heads. The pink and brown colour scheme may not count as a bonus.

Otel Gönül (☎ 261 1829; gonulltd@superonline.com.tr; Meydankapı Mahallesi 11; s/d €17/25) A way from the waterfront, near the museum, this tall, slightly quirky hotel comes with schoolyard murals in the stairways, statues in the 1st-floor café, pinks and yellows in the rooms and a mosque right next door.

Otel Sarı Kadir (☎ 260 1544; Derinboğazıcı Sokak 22; s/d/tr €17/25/28) Plain but spacious rooms with TV, sofa and fridge make this waterfront establishment a fine value choice. There are sea views from the front balconies, a terrace for breakfast and a tea garden right opposite.



Denizci Otel (☎ 260 5934; Kurtuluş Caddesi 13; s/d/tr €20/28/34) The Denizci goes for an all-round classy impression, and for the most part achieves it, especially in the slick bar-lounge. Rooms are compact but comfortable.

Eating

Sinop has a lively restaurant scene. The waterfront is lined with licensed Mediterranean-style open-air restaurants, right by the boats in the harbour.

Dolunay Pastanesi (☎ 261 8688; Kurtuluş Caddesi 14; desserts from €1.10; ☎ 9am-11pm) A bright and colourful tropical-styled patisserie for those après-fish sweet cravings.

Birhan Café (Atatürk Caddesi; mains €1.50-3; ☎ 9am-10pm) A slick bistro-café with a few modern design touches, pulling in a vaguely trendy young crowd for breakfast, drinks and grills.

Barınak Café (☎ 261 7421; İskele Caddesi 9; mains €2-4; ☎ 11am-11pm) The only waterfront eatery brave enough to skip seafood entirely, with an emphasis on pizzas, burgers and steaks – a welcome break if you're tired of fish and kebabs.

Kardelen Restaurant (☎ 260 3032; İskele Caddesi 4; mains €2.50-5; ☎ 11am-11pm) Just round the corner from the main harbour strip, this brown-toned restaurant has a more laid-back old-time vibe than some of its contemporaries, though it sticks to the same broad menu.

Saray Restaurant (☎ 261 1729; İskele Caddesi 18; fish dishes €4.50-7; ☎ 11am-11pm) Oft tipped as Sinop's top option, with a floating pontoon terrace bobbing right on the water next to the fishing boats in summer. Choose from the harbour-fresh fish on display – *cinekop* (bluefish), *levrek* or *barbun* – and sample it grilled or fried with a salad.

Drinking & Entertainment

Yalı Kahvesi (☎ 261 3996; Derinboğazazğı Sokak 14) A prime waterfront spot for nondiners throughout the day, with plastic tables spilling onto the terrace and pavement for the assorted drinkers and gamers.

Sinop Sofrası (☎ 260 5461; Pervane Medresesi, Batur Sokak) A mercifully cute little tea room just inside the gate of the old *medrese*, punting plenty of local products.

Burç Café (☎ 260 0420; Sinop Kalesi, Tersane Caddesi) This popular haunt perched in the tower of the fortifications attracts a feisty young crowd for live music, wide views and, of course, cold beer.

Lonca Disco Bar (Cumhuriyet Caddesi) The best of Sinop's handful of bars and discos, set in an enviable location in the city walls themselves, at the old Lonca gate.

Getting There & Away

The table, below, lists some useful daily services from Sinop's small otogar. There are no direct services to Amasra, 312km to the west; you'll need to take point-to-point minibuses or change at İnebolu or Cide.

SERVICES FROM SINOP'S OTOGAR

Destination	Fare	Duration	Distance	Frequency (per day)
Ankara	€20	9hr	443km	3
İnebolu	€7	3hr	156km	1 at 8am
İstanbul	€25	10½hr	700km	5
Karabük (for Safranbolu)	€14	6hr	340km	5
Samsun	€6	3½hr	168km	roughly hourly
Trabzon	€17	9hr	533km	1 at 8pm

AROUND SİNOP

If you have your own transport or fancy a day tour out of Sinop, there are a few attractions in nearby towns and villages – consult the tourist office or a travel agency for suggestions. The most common excursions are to **Erfelek**, famed for its 28 waterfalls, the historic fishing town of **Gerze** and the area around **Ayanık** (see p539). Walking and canoeing are popular pastimes for the more energetic visitor.

If you just want a dip in the Karadeniz (Black Sea), the black-sand **Karakum Plajı** is about 3km east of Sinop harbour, with a restaurant, camp site and a couple of homestays.

SAMSUN

☎ 0362 / pop 364,000

Samsun is the largest city on the coast, known primarily as a major port and commercial centre. While the local tourist board is trying to market it as a spa town, few travellers stop for more than a bite to eat or a change of bus – even the enterprising Genoese only paused long enough to burn the city to the ground in the 15th century. That said, there are enough facilities here to warrant a convenience break.

Orientation & Information

The city centre is Cumhuriyet Meydanı (Republic Sq), inland, and just west of Atatürk

Park, which lies on the coastal highway (Atatürk Bulvarı). Southeast of the park stands the old *vilayet*. The huge Samsun *valiliği* building is across Atatürk Bulvarı to the north. Cumhuriyet Caddesi runs along the south side of the park.

The **tourist office** (☎ 431 1228; Atatürk Bulvarı; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm daily Jun-Aug, Mon-Fri Sep-May), across the coastal road from Cumhuriyet Meydanı, gives out decent maps and brochures, including a list of spas, and may also offer to arrange tours.

The train station is 550m southeast of Atatürk Park on the shore road, Atatürk Bulvarı, while the otogar is a further 1.5km southeast, also on the shore road.

Sights

With an hour or so to spare it's well worth visiting the **Archaeology & Ethnography Museum** (Arkeoloji ve Etnografya Müzesi; ☎ 431 6828; Fuar Caddesi; admission €1.10; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun), west of the Samsun Valiliği building. The most striking exhibit is a huge Romano-Byzantine mosaic depicting Thetis, Achilles and the Four Seasons, found nearby at Karasamsun (Amisos). Other highlights include the elegant gold jewellery found in a cemetery tomb in 1995, thought to date from the time of the legendary Mithridates (VI Eupator, 120 to 130 BC), and a daunting display on ancient skull surgery.

Right next door is the **Atatürk Museum** (Atatürk Müzesi; Fuar Caddesi), commemorating the start of the War of Independence here on 19 May 1919. The museum was closed at time of research.

After the highbrow stuff, you could nip along the coast road and indulge your inner (or outer) child at the **Akyol Luna Park** funfair.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Necmi (☎ 432 7164; otelnecmi@hotmail.com; Bedestan Sokak 6; s/d/tr with shared bathroom €11/20/25) Not the best budget option you'll ever come across: breakfast is not included, and when we visited there were some distinctly unpleasant smells. It's the cheapest you'll get, though, and the clothing-bazaar location is fun.

Samsun Park Otel (☎ 435 0095; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 38; s/d/tr €25/34/50) A hieroglyphic lift whisks you up to a full set of compact but perfectly comfortable rooms just south of the city centre. As well as having a house restaurant it's near several good patisseries.

Vidinli Oteli (☎ 431 6050; Kazımpaşa Caddesi 4; s/d €34/50; ☎ ☎) Rooms here seem a bit plain for the price you pay, even with sea views,

but overall standards are good and there's a smart bar-restaurant to tear you away from the digital TV.

North Point Hotel (☎ 435 9595; www.northpointhotel.com; Atatürk Bulvarı 594; s/d €44/61; ☎ ☎) Twelve storeys of new conference-class comfort on the coast road. Buses and dolmuşes stop conveniently right outside, and you can look out and chuckle at how much guests in the huge Büyük Samsun Oteli opposite must be paying.

Sıla Restaurant (☎ 432 9515; Vilayet Karşısı 36; mains €1.50-5; ☎ 9am-9pm) *Şiş*, *İskender* and all the usual kebab and pide favourites await your pleasure at this reliable central eatery.

Demircioğlu Balık Restaurant (☎ 435 7550; Kazımpaşa Caddesi 20; mains €3-8; ☎ 11am-10pm) Samsun's number-one fish pedlar is a neat little brick house wedged between nondescript blocks, dishing up fine fresh sea-dwellers in its quaint 1st-floor dining room.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are three or four daily direct flights to Istanbul with **Turkish Airlines** (☎ 435 2330; Kazımpaşa Caddesi 18/A) and one with **Onur Air** (☎ 431 6665; 19 Mayıs Bulvarı 35/2). Turkish Airlines also has one daily service to Ankara. Both companies operate a *servis* (shuttle minibus) from their offices to the airport (€3).

BUS

Most major bus companies have offices at the Cumhuriyet Meydanı end of Cumhuriyet Caddesi. Services to major destinations are listed in the table, below; to the otogar costs €0.55.

SERVICES FROM SAMSUN'S OTOGAR

Destination	Fare	Duration	Distance	Frequency (per day)
Amasya	€5	2½hr	130km	frequent
Ankara	€17	7hr	420km	frequent
Artvin	€14	8hr	577km	4
Giresun	€8.50	3½hr	220km	5
İstanbul	€25	11hr	750km	several
Kayseri	€20	9hr	530km	a few
Sinop	€5.60	3hr	168km	several
Trabzon	€11	6hr	355km	several
Ünye	€4	1½hr	95km	every 30 minutes

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Samsun has a small cluster of car-rental agencies along or around Lise Caddesi, including

TRACING THE AMAZONS

The Samsun–Ünye region, and the small town of Terme in particular, is often associated with one of the most enduring peoples found in Greek mythology: the Amazons. This fierce race of warrior women, famed for cutting off one breast to aid their archery skills, were said to have ruled the coast in pre-Pontic times and picked fights with everyone from the Lycians to the Phrygians. Writers from Homer and Herodotus to Amasya's own Strabo all relate various tales involving these strapping female soldiers, some more credible than others: the greatest relish is reserved for discussion of their supposed reproductive habits, suggesting either annual coitus with a neighbouring tribe or 'breeding colonies' of captive male sex slaves. If you believe some early biographers, Alexander the Great himself may have had a child with the Amazonian queen Thalestris!

Historically speaking, there is little evidence to support any Amazonian presence in the Black Sea area around the purported 1200 BC timeframe, though female warrior burials have been found in central Asia. One theory is that the myth sprang from the role of high priestesses in certain mother-goddess cults, while other historians believe that it arose from travellers encountering Anatolian tribes with matriarchal systems or simply a measure of equality between the sexes, which would have run contrary to their own ingrained sense of gender roles.

Wherever the story came from, it was one of many classical legends to capture public imagination in the following centuries, and eventually provided the name for the world's largest river. Who would have thought coastal Turkey could have something in common with rainforest Brazil?

Avis (☎ 231 6750; Ümraniye Sokak 2) and **Budget** (☎ 231 5300; Lise Caddesi). To find them, head southeast for about 700m from Atatürk Park along Cumhuriyet Caddesi.

TRAIN

Two daily trains run from Samsun **station** (☎ 233 5002) to Sivas (€8.50, 8½ hours) and Amasya (€3, three hours).

ÜNYE

☎ 0452 / pop 70,000

You'd never think it to look at it, but Ünye, a small, pretty holiday town amid hazelnut groves 95km east of Samsun, has one of the longest settlement histories in Anatolia, with evidence of inhabitation going back to the Paleolithic period. The town's position at the junction of the Silk Road and the coastal highway made it an important port during the Ottoman period. The great Turkish mystical poet Yunus Emre, who wrote during the early 14th century, is thought to have been born here, and it's also believed that one St Nicholas lived nearby, in the days before he became known as Santa Claus. Despite all this history, though, most visitors find Ünye little more than a brief and pleasant coastal stopover.

The friendly **tourist office** (☎ 323 2569; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri), in the pink government Kaymakamlığı building on the main square, dispenses a couple of brochures and can dem-

onstrate a fuzzy computer slideshow of the area's main attractions.

Sights & Activities

About 7km inland from the town stands **Ünye Castle**, a ruined fortress founded by the Pontics and rebuilt by the Byzantines, with an ancient tomb cut into the rock face below. To get there catch a minibus heading to Kaleköy or Akkuş (€0.30) from the Niksar road, and ask to be dropped off at the road to the castle. From here you've got at least a half-hour trek to the top.

Another minor excursion is the **Tozkoparan Kay Mezarı** (Tozkoparan Rock Tomb), off the Trabzon road 5km from the centre. Any east-bound minibus can drop you by the cement factory at the turn for the cave.

Back in town, just east of the square, have a look at the **Ali-Namik Soysal Eski Hamam**, which was once a church. It's open to men from early morning to noon and all day Sunday, and for women from noon until 4pm. The massive **plane trees** in the centre are also worthy of note – they're reckoned to be around 500 years old.

Sleeping

Otel Çınar (☎ 323 1148; Hükümet Caddesi 18; s/d €8.50/17) A recent lick of paint has spruced up this central budget option, which remains good value. Some bathrooms are shared, and no breakfast is provided.

Otel Lider (☎ 324 9250; Hükümet Caddesi 36; s/d €11/22) Another good pick for the thrifty traveller, comfortably central, with unfussy rooms, functional bathrooms, digital TV and a pleasant rooftop terrace. Breakfast costs €2.

Hotel Grand Kuşçalı (☎ 324 5200; Devlet Sahilyolu Şehir Merkezi 42; s/d/tr €28/48/59; ☎) The billet of choice for tour groups, the Kuşçalı isn't *that* grand but there's nothing else in town to touch it for facilities or contemporary style. Perks include sauna, *hamam* and sea-facing 6th-floor restaurant.

Ünye has a generous eight camp sites and a handful of beach pensions, mostly spread out along the Samsun road west of town. **Café Gülen Plaj Camping** (☎ 324 7368; Devlet Sahil Yolu; camp sites €6, bungalows €30) has an excellent setting and cute wooden bungalows. The adjoining **Uzunkum Restaurant Plaj & Camping** (☎ 323 2022; Devlet Sahil Yolu; camp sites €6) is another welcoming spot graced with a beachfront setting and loads of shade. Green-and-white minibuses regularly ply the coastal route between these places and the centre of town from early in the morning until around 11pm.

Eating

Café Vanilya (☎ 324 4106; Cumhuriyet Meydanı 3; snacks €1-3; ☎ 10am-8pm) Set in a rather swish restored villa-style townhouse, the Vanilya is a tentatively chic but unpretentious terrace café serving Ünye's would-be bright young things.

Evim (☎ 324 3341; Hacı Emin Caddesi; dishes €1-3; ☎ 8am-7pm) A genuinely local eatery off the main square, dishing up homemade baklava, *börek* (filled pastries) and *mantı* (Turkish ravioli) to real regulars.

Sofra (☎ 323 4083; Belediye Caddesi 25; mains €1-5; ☎ 9am-11pm) No relation to the international restaurant chain, this Sofra is a square stone house facing the sea, with a weighty range of kebaps and Ottoman dishes. The roadside terrace is sheathed in plastic, which keeps out fumes but kills the atmosphere a bit.

Çakırtepe (☎ 323 2568; Çakırtepe; mains €2-5; ☎ 11am-10pm) Atop the hill west of the town centre, this picnic site, tea garden and café is a local favourite for long summer lunches. Enjoy the sublime views and tuck into the deservedly revered pide or *güveç* (stew in a clay pot). Minibuses leave from the west side of Cumhuriyet Meydanı, and will take you within steps of the restaurant.

Çamlık Restaurant (☎ 323 1175; Çamlık İçi; mains €2-5; ☎ 11am-10pm) This is another popular picnic

place and recreation area, featuring a good selection of fish and meat dishes, along with delicious mezes. In summer, the shady terrace overlooking the sea is reason enough to come here.

Yunus Emre Çay Bahçesi (☎ 323 3068; Yunus Emre Parkı; dishes €2.50-4; ☎ 9am-9pm) Unusually, this big, well-frequented tea garden beside the pier serves substantial pides and stews as well as the usual drinks, perfect for sunset with sustenance.

Park Restaurant (☎ 323 3053; Devlet Sahil Yolu 6; mains €3-6; ☎ 11am-11pm) Generally rammed with families, tour groups and other voluble tablefuls, the Park is unashamedly outré with its pink exterior and bogus classicism. Luckily the menu is wide-ranging, the open terrace is gorgeous, the booze flows freely and the live music helps things along.

Getting There & Away

Bus companies have offices on the coastal road. Minibuses and midibuses rumble up and down this road to Samsun (€4, 1½ hours) and Ordu (€4, 1¾ hours), via Fatsa, Bolaman and Perşembe, roughly every 20 minutes.

AROUND ÜNYE

About 5km east of Ünye, the road passes the otogar, the cement factory and the **Asarkaya National Park** (☎ May-Oct), a forested recreation zone with facilities for walkers and picnickers. Another 14km along is the slightly tacky town of **Fatsa**. From here the shore is largely forested, and the winding road throws up some lovely vistas, at least until you hit **Bolaman**, which has little going for it except a handful of dilapidated Ottoman wooden houses. Then you'll pass **Çaka Beach**, an unexpectedly delightful strip of white sand, and arguably the best beach on the Black Sea; if you've been smart and packed a picnic, it's worth pausing here in the shade. **Perşembe**, 15km west of Ordu, faces a pretty harbour with two lighthouses. If you need to break up your journey, drop by the modern two-star **Dede Evi** (☎ 0452-517 3802; Atatürk Bulvarı; s/d €18/24), a smart option boasting sea views and high standards, with wrought-iron balconies, parquet flooring and rooms decorated in warm yellow tones.

You can get to any of these towns by flagging down the many minibuses or midibuses going in either direction along the coast road – you shouldn't have to wait too long.

ORDU

☎ 0452 / pop 113,000

An old town with a modern heart, Ordu is about 80km east of Ünye, basing its bustling, well-kept centre around a pleasant seafront boulevard. The city limits sprawl in both directions, but somehow it's easy to feel like you're in a small resort when you're pottering around the narrow central streets.

The **tourist office** (☎ 223 1608; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, Mon-Sat Jun-Aug) is conveniently situated on the sea-facing side of the *belediye*, just east of the mosque on the coastal road. It's run by the very friendly and knowledgeable M Gürcan, who speaks good English.

Internet access is available at **Ordu Net** (Fidanğor Sokak; per hr €0.55; 🕒 10am-midnight).

Sights

A gem of a place, **Pasha's Palace & Ethnography Museum** (Paşaoğlu Konağı ve Etnografya Müzesi; Taşocak Caddesi; admission €1.10; 🕒 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm Tue-Sun) occupies a late-19th-century house 500m uphill from Cumhuriyet Meydanı. Signs reading 'Müze – Museum' direct you here past the small handicrafts bazaar. The downstairs displays are easily overshadowed by the recreated Ottoman rooms on the 1st floor, furnished with worn original artefacts that only add to the authenticity of the set-up. The tiles and braziers are notable touches, as is the chair where Atatürk himself supposedly had a rest in 1924.

A few other scraps of Ordu's old town survive, centred around the **Tasbaşı Cultural Centre**, an old Greek church about 800m from the main square. A perfectly placed terrace café is due to open here soon.

If you have some more time, catch a dolmuş up the hill to **Boztepe** (6.5km) for breathtaking views over the town and the coast. Bring a picnic, or nibble on snacks in one of the restaurants there.

Sleeping & Eating

The accommodation and eating scene in Ordu is disappointingly limited, but there are a couple of notable exceptions worth considering.

Hotel Turist (☎ 225 3140; Atatürk Bulvarı 134; s/d/tr €23/34/45; 🍷) Distinctly unimpressive for the price, these basic rooms in mustard tones aren't always as fragrant as they could be, but sea-facing front balconies and a conservatory breakfast room help redeem them.

Karlibel Atlıhan Hotel (☎ 225 0565; www.karlibelhotel.com; Kazım Karabekir Caddesi 7; s/d/tr €28/50/67; 🍷) A much more professional establishment with spacious rooms in subdued colours and hints at a predilection for horse art. The same firm runs another fine hotel in converted Ottoman buildings just outside town.

Jazz Café (☎ 214 6778; Simpasa Caddesi 28; mains €2.50-4; 🕒 9am-10pm) A modern, musically themed eatery on Ordu's pedestrian shopping drag, it offers everything from pizza and omelettes to *gözleme* and *kumpir* (baked potatoes). Sadly, it's no relation to the great London venue.

Ayıyığı (☎ 223 2870; Atatürk Bulvarı; mains €3-6; 🕒 from 11am) Occupying a bizarre rounded concrete structure on the beach, not unlike a bunker, the 'Moonlight' combines a terrace café, restaurant and *meyhane* (Turkish pub) to good effect, with a tea terrace on top for daytime sea-gazing.

Grand Mıdı Restaurant (☎ 214 0340; İskele Üstü 55; mains €3-8; 🕒 11am-11pm) On the shore near the tourist office, a long, covered pontoon leads to a bright, very spacious dining room on stilts. The interior boasts black-and-white pictures of old Ordu, full colour views of the real thing, and a strong line in fish from the surrounding sea.

Getting There & Around

Buses from behind the *belediye* leave every half-hour for Giresun (€2, one hour); for Ünye (€4, 1¼ hours) you must go to the bus stand, 1.5km east of the centre, or flag down a minibus along the coastal road.

Local dolmuşes regularly loop through the city centre. Line 2 will take you from the centre of town past the Karlibel İkizler Hotel in one direction, and near the otogar in the other. A dolmuş to Boztepe costs €0.85.

GİRESUN

☎ 0454 / pop 84,000

The town of Giresun, 46km east of Ordu, was founded some 3000 years ago and is steeped in history. Legend has it that Jason and the Argonauts passed by on their voyage to the fabled Kingdom of Colchis (Georgia), on the eastern shores of the Black Sea, in search of the Golden Fleece. The city is also credited with introducing cherries to Italy, and from there to the rest of the world; apparently even the name Giresun comes from the Greek for cherry.

Today Giresun's wealth still grows on trees, but now it's the humble hazelnut that brings in most revenue – the area is widely reputed to have the best *fındık* plantations in Turkey. Come here to enjoy the edible treats as well as fabulous views over the city and bay from the hillside park near the centre.

Orientation & Information

The centre of Giresun is Atapark on the coastal road. The *belediye* is just inland from the park. The main commercial street is Gazi Caddesi, climbing steeply uphill from the *belediye*.

There is a **tourist office** (☎ 216 4707; Gazi Caddesi 9; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) and a more convenient **kiosk** (🕒 8am-5pm) in Atapark, but there's no English spoken at either place. The **PTT** and several internet cafés are a few hundred metres uphill from the *belediye*.

Sights & Activities

Once you've had your fill of hazelnuts, cherries and chocolate bars containing hazelnuts or cherries, burn off the calories by walking the 2km to the **Kalepark** (Castle Park), perched on the steep hillside above the town. This beautiful shady park offers panoramic views of the town and the sea. It also has beer gardens for a sunset brew, groves for lovers and barbecues for grillers. It's busy on weekends.

No public transport serves the park, so you'll need to walk inland and uphill from Atapark on Gazi Caddesi and turn left onto Bekirpaşa Caddesi, 200m or so past the Otel Kit-Tur. A taxi costs around €2.

The **City Museum** (Şehir Müzesi; ☎ 212 1322; Atatürk Bulvarı 62; admission €1.10; 🕒 8am-5pm) is housed in the disused 18th-century Gogora church, 1.5km around the promontory east of Atapark on the coastal road. The building is more appealing than the museum itself, with well-preserved architectural features outshining the usual archaeological and ethnographic sections.

If you plan on spending a bit more time here, you could explore the old houses in the **Zeytinlik** district, or head to the **alpine plateaus** about 40km inland, which offer ample walking opportunities and some winter sports.

Festivals & Events

The four-day **International Giresun Aksu Festival**, starting annually on 20 May, hails rebirth,

fecundity and the start of the new growing season with concerts, traditional dance performances and other open-air events.

Sleeping & Eating

As Giresun isn't much of a tourist town, most hotels here cater primarily to Turkish businesspeople.

Er-Tur Otel (☎ 216 1757; otelertur@myinet.com; Çapulacılar Sokak 8; s/d/tr €17/25/36) Unfussy but entirely acceptable one-star standards on a side street east of the Atapark. The 'family' triples can sleep four people on request.

Otel Ormanlılar (☎ 212 4391; otelormanli@hotmail.com; Gazi Caddesi 37; s/d/tr €20/28/34; 🍷) Essentially the best midrange deal in town, the Ormanlılar tricks its rooms out with starburst doors and brown tones, with TV and phone, and there's even an in-house jeweller. There's a bit of street noise but nothing to lose sleep over.

Otel Çarıkçı (☎ 216 1026; otelcarikci@yahoo.com; Osmanağa Caddesi 6; s/d/tr €25/35/42; 🍷) More excellent value in this price range, flashing laminate floors, shiny new tiled bathrooms and wireless internet access. It's down the first street off Gazi Caddesi.

Otel Başar (☎ 212 9920; www.hotelbasar.com.tr; Atatürk Bulvarı; s/d/tr €34/56/67; 🍷) Right on the waterfront by the busy coast road, it's far better to be inside this eight-storey eyesore than outside, not least because it's actually surprisingly tasteful and well laid-out. Facilities include a roof café and smart restaurant.

Deniz Lokantası (☎ 216 1158; Alpaslan Caddesi 3; mains €1.10-4; 🕒 10am-10pm) Next to the *belediye*, this modernised cafeteria has been churning out decent meals since 1953. It's very busy at lunch time.

Ellez (☎ 216 1491; Fatih Caddesi 9; mains €1.50-4; 🕒 10am-10pm) One block north of Atapark, this cute little *pide-lahmacun*-pizza joint has an upstairs salon with straggly plants and Turkish flags protruding from the tiny balcony.

Getting There & Away

The bus station is 4km west of the centre, but buses usually drop people at Atapark too. Frequent minibuses shuttle from Giresun to Trabzon (€4, two hours) and to Ordu (€2, one hour). Trabzon services leave from offices on the main road one block east of Atapark; those to Ordu stop on the main highway opposite. Several daily buses head west to Samsun (p543).

MIDRANGE

Hotel Nazar (Map p550; ☎ 323 0081; www.nazarhotel.net; Güzelhisar Caddesi 5; s/d €28/50; 🏠) If you can forgive the flagrant Photoshopping in the brochure (flower gardens in central Trabzon? Nice try), you'll find the Nazar a slick, smart modern business-class option. The manager speaks English and is keen to dispense tips on his home Kaçkar region.

Otel Horon (Map p550; ☎ 326 6455; www.otelhoron.com; Sıramağazalar Caddesi 125; s/d €36/53; 🏠) The dull grey frontage belies the genuine internal appeal of the Horon's mildly dated décor and unflashy rooms, not to mention the well-stocked minibars and uninterrupted views from the rooftop bar and restaurant. It employs some female reception staff, which is generally a good sign of propriety here.

Hotel Omesa (Map p549; ☎ 323 0151; hotelomesa@mynet.com; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 22; s/d/tr €39/53/70; 🏠) Aiming for a business-modern style, the Omesa may not entirely justify its room rates with salmon walls and gold linen, but it's 'purified from environmental problems', the location's a handy five minutes from the airport, and the bar has live music three times a week.

Otel Sağiroğlu (Map p550; ☎ 3323 2899; www.sagirogluhotel.com, in Turkish; Taksim İshani Sokak 1; s/d/tr €56/80/89; 🏠) This large yellow block offers plenty of amenities but seems to be lacking some of the quality control you'd expect to find at this price: perhaps they're hoping the occasional Impressionist print will distract guests from the stained carpets.

TOP END

Usta Park Hotel (Map p550; ☎ 326 5700; www.ustaparkhotel.com; İskenderpaşa Mahallesi 3; s/d/tr €90/115/150; 🏠) The new incarnation of what was once an irredeemably dodgy scum pit is clearly out to impress its intended business clientele, flaunting a tenuous Egyptian-themed lobby, a restaurant, bar, fitness centre, travel agency, *hamam*, understated rooms and staff who are service oriented.

Zorlu Grand Hotel (Map p550; ☎ 326 8400; www.zorulugrand.com; Maraş Caddesi 9; s/d €200/250, ste €287-750; 🏠) Understatement is the last thing on anyone's mind at this ludicrously extravagant five-star. The immense mezzanine atrium is quite staggering, touched by the strains of classical music (the only time you'll ever hear harpsichord in Turkey), and the list of facilities is as long as a sultan's genealogy,

with two restaurants, two cafés, a pub and a *hamam* just for starters. Worthwhile mainly if you can negotiate a substantial *indirim* (discount).

Eating

Trabzon is not the gastronomic capital of the Black Sea, but scores of cheap and cheerful *lokantas* (restaurants) vie for your custom around Atatürk Alanı and in the two main drags to the west.

Seyidoğlu (Map p550; Uzun Sokak 15A; dishes €0.55-2; 🍷 8am-9pm) This small, tiled snack stop has been dishing up succulent, thin-crust *lahmacun* (Arabic pizza) and kebabs for 38 years, and regulars still swear by it.

İstanbul Kır Pidesi (Map p549; ☎ 321 2212; Uzun Sokak 48; mains €1-2; 🍷 8am-10pm) A top choice for pide and *börek* aficionados at any time of day.

Tuvana Café (Map p550; ☎ 326 0443; Kunduraclar Caddesi, Sanat Sokak 2; mains €2.50-4.50; 🍷 9.30am-9.30pm) Discreetly mounted on the 1st floor of a restored house, this quietly chic café-restaurant show some ambition in its dishes and some class in its presentation.

Brasserie Pera (Map p550; ☎ 326 4696; Yavuz Selim Bulvarı 173; mains €2.50-4.50; 🍷 8am-11pm) The Pera brings full European bar-bistro style to Trabzon, from the pop art and plasma screens to the eccentric music policy. The menu takes in burgers, salads, pasta, chicken, plenty of lighter grills and a good range of beverages.

Hürrem Sultan Sofrası (Map p550; ☎ 321 8651; Maraş Caddesi 30; mains €2.50-6; 🍷 9am-10pm) An above-average cafeteria restaurant in shades of pistachio, enlivening the usual kebab-grill spectrum with regional specialities such as *muhlama* and *kuyumak* (melted cheese dishes; see boxed text, p556).

Park Café & Restaurant (Map p549; ☎ 322 2999; İskenderpaşa İlkolul Karşısı, Uzun Sokak; mains €3.50-5; 🍷 8am-10pm) Tucked away behind a courtyard car park off Uzun Sokak, this 1st-floor family restaurant adds a refined, almost exclusive feel to the kebab experience. The hall underneath is popular for weddings and other big occasions.

Fevzi Hoca Balık-Köfte (Map p550; ☎ 326 5444; İpekyolu İş Merkezi, Maraş Caddesi; meals €7-14; 🍷 noon-9.30pm) The fish dinners at this speciality restaurant opposite the Zorlu Grand are top value, including salad, pickles and even desert in the meal price. Tightwads and fish-haters can opt for the bargain *köfte* (€1.50).

The sweet treats at **Kılıcoğlu** (Map p549; ☎ 321 4525; Uzun Sokak 42; desserts from €1.10; 🍷 9am-10pm) are damn near irresistible, whatever time you wander past the window. Eat in and have your profiteroles with ice cream (€3.50). For more sweetness, **Mevlana Kuruyemiş** (Map p550; ☎ 321 9622; Uzun Sokak 31) is a renowned *kuruyemiş* (dried fruit) vendor, and also sells fattening *lokum* (Turkish delight), *helva* (a traditional sweet made from sesame seeds), *pestil* (sheets of dried fruit) and some excellent *kestane balı* (chestnut honey). Virtually next door, **Beton Helva** (Map p550; ☎ 321 2550; Uzun Sokak 15/B) is an old-fashioned local specialist, selling slabs of *helva* like paving stones at all hours. Also worth investigating is **Cirav Fındık** (Map p550; ☎ 322 2050; Ticaret Mektep Sokak 8/C), off Maraş Caddesi, where you can take your pick from numerous varieties of hazelnut and related confectionery.

Drinking

Trabzon quieters down quite drastically after dark and, while there is certainly a drinking scene, most places close by midnight.

Keyif Coffee & Tea Store (Map p550; ☎ 326 8026; Canbakkal İş Merkezi, Uzun Sokak) Achieving a rare level of hauteur amid its hefty leather armchairs and tartan wallpaper, the Keyif offers no fewer than 200 varieties of hot beverage to tantalise tea-loving tastebuds.

Stress Café (Map p549; ☎ 321 3044; Uzun Sokak) Misnomers don't come more ironic than this: whether you're chilling out with a nargileh on the back terrace or funking it up to live music in the downstairs bar, stress will be the last thing on your mind here.

Bordo Mavi (Map p549; ☎ 326 2077; Halkevi Caddesi 12) This atmospheric bar-café hangout is the clubhouse of Trabzonspor, the beloved local football team. The garden seating is popular with a buzzy young crowd in summer but, rather unsportingly, the whole place closes by 10pm.

Şişman Efes Pub (Map p550; ☎ 326 6083; Maraş Caddesi 5) Now this is a proper pub: wooden tables, doodling barman, music drowned out by the general hubbub and the eponymous Efes beer served in 2.5L towers (€8) on request.

Beer Time (Map p550; Atatürk Alanı) Another hostelry in the same vein as the Şişman, but spread over two whole storeys, with wooden floors and a largely male crowd, just avoiding that spit'n'sawdust feel.

Café Life (Map p549; ☎ 321 2955; Halkevi Caddesi 15) Choose Life: just opposite the Bordo Mavi,

this wood-floored café-bar offers a beguiling mix of fast food and folky live music.

Shopping

Thanks to the influx of cheap goods and materials from the former Soviet territories, Trabzon is a good place to shop for clothes and other essentials, especially from the Russian Bazaar (Map p550) stalls near the port; a T-shirt, complete with designer logo, should set you back just €3.

This is also a prime area for leather goods – half a dozen shops along Sıramağazalar Caddesi sell jackets, bags and other garments, with alterations or made-to-measure fittings available. At the time of research the standard asking price for a basic soft-leather jacket was US\$100, maybe half what you'd pay in İstanbul.

Getting There & Away**AIR**

Trabzon is well served by all the main carriers, and the centre is peppered with airline agents dealing exclusively in domestic flight tickets.

Turkish Airlines (☎ 321 1680; www.thy.com) has two daily flights to Ankara (1½ hours), three or four daily flights to İstanbul's Atatürk International airport (1¾ hours), two daily flights to İstanbul Sabiha Gökçen (1¾ hours) and four flights a week to İzmir (two hours).

Pegasus Airlines (www.flypgs.com) has two daily direct flights to Sabiha Gökçen and one to Ankara. **Atlasjet** (☎ 444 3387; www.atlasjet.com), **Fly Air** (☎ 326 4707; www.flyair.com.tr) and **Onur Air** (☎ 325 6292; www.onurair.com.tr) each have two daily direct flights to İstanbul Atatürk.

BOAT

Burcu Turizm (Map p549; ☎ 321 9588; Mimar Sinan Caddesi), near the Russian consulate, and **Gürgen Turizm** (Map p550; ☎ 321 4439; İskele Caddesi 61), one of several similar offices down by the harbour, sell tickets for ferries going to Sochi in Russia (€42, twice weekly). Burcu Turizm can also help arrange visas (see boxed text, p674).

BUS

Trabzon's otogar is 3km east of the port, on the landward side of the shore road, Devlet Sahil Yolu Caddesi. It is served by dolmuşes running along the coastal road and up to Atatürk Alanı.

There are no direct buses to Ayder; you'll have to catch a bus heading to Hopa and change at Pazar or Ardeşen. Some useful daily services are listed in the table, below.

SERVICES FROM TRABZON'S OTOGAR

Destination Fare Duration Distance Frequency

Ankara	€20	12hr	780km	several per day
Artvin	€9	4½hr	255km	frequent
Baku (Azerbaijan)	€28	30hr	-	1 weekly
Erzurum	€11	6hr	325km	several per day
Hopa	€7.50	3½hr	165km	half-hourly
Istanbul	€35	24hr	1110km	several per day
Kars	€20	10hr	525km	1 nightly or change at Erzurum or Artvin
Kayseri	€23	12hr	686km	several per day
Rize	€2.80	1hr	75km	half-hourly
Samsun	€11	6hr	355km	frequent
Sinop	€17	9hr	533km	1 at 8pm
Tiflis (Tbilisi, Georgia)	€14	20hr	-	several per day
Erivan (Armenia, via Tiflis)	€23	25hr	-	2 per day Fri-Sun

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

There are several car-hire agencies in Trabzon, including **Avis** (Map p550; ☎ 322 3740; Gazipaşa Caddesi 20) and smaller companies such as **Eko Rent A Car** (Map p550; ☎ 322 2575; Gazipaşa Caddesi 3/53).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The *havaalanı* (airport) is 5.5km east of Atatürk Alani. Dolmuşes to the airport (€0.55) leave from a side street on the northern side of Atatürk Alani, but they drop you on the opposite side of the main coastal road, 500m from the terminal entrance. Alternatively, you can pay €3 extra to be dropped at the door. A taxi costs about €8. Buses bearing the legend 'Park' or 'Meydan' go to Atatürk Alani from the airport.

BUS & DOLMUŞ

To reach Atatürk Alani from the otogar, cross the shore road in front of the terminal, turn left, walk to the bus stop and catch any

bus with 'Park' or 'Meydan' in its name; the dolmuş for Atatürk Alani is marked 'Garajlar-Meydan'. A taxi between the otogar and Atatürk Alani costs €4.

The easiest way to get to Trabzon's otogar is to catch a dolmuş marked 'Garajlar' or 'KTÜ' from the northeastern side of Atatürk Alani.

Dolmuşes mainly leave from Atatürk Alani, although you can flag them down along their routes. Whatever your destination, the fare should be €0.50.

TAXI

There are several taxi stands in the centre, including one on Atatürk Alani.

AROUND TRABZON Sumela Monastery

One of the highlights of the Black Sea coast, the Greek Orthodox **Monastery of the Virgin Mary** (admission €2.80; ☎ 9am-6pm Jun-Aug, 9am-4pm Sep-May) at Sumela, 46km south of Trabzon, was founded in Byzantine times and abandoned in 1923 after the creation of the Turkish Republic put paid to hopes of creating a new Greek state in this region. The setting is absolutely magical. The monastery clings to a sheer rock wall high above evergreen forests and a rushing mountain stream. It can be a mysterious, eerie place, especially when mists swirl among the tops of the trees in the valley below and the weird, ethereal call of an unseen mosque filters strangely through the forest.

To get to Sumela, take the Erzurum road and turn left at Maçka, 29km south of Trabzon. It's also signposted as Meryemana (Virgin Mary), to whom the monastery was dedicated.

The road then winds into dense evergreen forests, following the course of a rushing mountain stream interrupted by commercial trout pools. Village houses reminiscent of those in the alpine areas of central Europe are interspersed with more modern brick blocks.

If you're driving, at the entrance to Altındere Vadisi Milli Parkı (Altındere Valley National Park) you pay €4 per vehicle to visit the monastery.

At the end of the road you'll find a shady park with picnic tables by a roaring brook, a post office, the Sumela Restaurant and several bungalows for rent (no camping is allowed).

The head of the trail up to the monastery begins by the restaurant and is steep but easy to follow. A second trail begins further up the valley. To get to it, follow the concreted road 1km uphill and across two bridges until you come to a wooden footbridge over the stream on the right, marked by a sign reading 'Manastıra gider' (to the monastery). This trail cuts straight up through the trees, past the shell of the Ayavarvara chapel. On busy days it's likely to be much quieter than the main route.

If you drive even further up the road, you reach a small car park, from which it's only a 10-minute walk to the monastery.

As you climb through forests and alpine meadows, catching occasional glimpses of the monastery above you, the air gets noticeably cooler. You'll ascend 250m in about 30 to 45 minutes. In autumn, just before the snow arrives, a beautiful variety of crocus, *kar çiçeği* (snowflower), blooms in the meadows.

After the ticket office, a steep flight of steps leads up the rock face to the monastery complex, sheltered underneath a hefty outcrop. The main chapel, cut into the rock, is the indisputable highlight, covered both inside and outside with colourful frescoes. The earliest examples date from the 9th century, but most of them are actually 19th-century work. Sadly, bored shepherd boys used the paintings as targets for their catapults, and later heedless visitors – from Russian tourists to USAF grunts (1965 vintage) – scratched their names into them, proving that idiocy is indeed international.

In recent years the monastery has been substantially rebuilt in an effort to make sense of the various chapels and rooms for visitors (look out for the old lavatories). You're still likely to find builders at the site as the restoration works continue.

SLEEPING & EATING

Maçkam Hotel (☎ 512 3640; s/d €28/45) In the centre of Maçka, this is a good option offering fine standards across yellow-themed rooms, aided by what must have been a job lot of comfy chairs.

Hotel Büyük Sumela (☎ 512 3540; www.sumelatoel.com in Turkish; s/d/tr €55/70/93; 🍷 🍴) Buying into its own four-star pomp, the BS seems to have its eye on a Sumela monopoly, controlling both the Maçkam and the Sumela Sosyal Tesis-

leri. Facilities in the eight-storey block on the edge of Maçka are generous to say the least, but frankly we'd rather stay in either of its other properties.

Coşandere Tesisleri Restaurant & Pansiyon (☎ 531 1190; www.cosandere.com, in Turkish; Sümela Yolu; r from €17) Located in Coşandere, a tiny stream-fed village 5km out of Maçka, this place has three pine-clad *seranders* sleeping up to six and a huge new building with motel-like rooms, favoured by tour groups. The owners organise various tours, treks, day trips and even paintballing in the area.

Sümela Sosyal Tesisleri (☎ 531 1207; bungalows from €45) Right by the car park at Sumela itself, this is a row of comfortable A-frame bungalows with full amenities, including kitchenette. The restaurant is just across the road by the stream. It's a bit overpriced, but you're paying for the attractive setting.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From May to the end of August, Ulusoy and Metro run buses from Trabzon to Sumela, departing at 10am from outside their Atatürk Alani offices and returning at 3pm. Return tickets cost €8.50.

Dolmuşes for Maçka (€0.85) or Coşandere village (€3) depart all day from the minibus dolmuş ranks by the Russian Bazaar. It'll cost you €5.60 all the way to Sumela, but you'll have to wait until the driver decides enough people are coming.

A couple of Trabzon agencies (see p551) run basic tours to Sumela.

TRABZON TO ERZURUM

Heading south into the mountains, you're in for a long (325km) but scenic ride. Along the highway south, you zoom straight to **Maçka**, 29km inland from Trabzon. About 1.5km north of Maçka look out along the roadside for basaltic rock columns resembling California's Devil's Postpile or Northern Ireland's Giant's Causeway. From Maçka, you begin the gradual climb along a mountain road through active landslide zones towards the **Zigana Geçidi** (Zigana Pass; 2030m).

The dense, humid air of the coast disappears as you rise and becomes light and dry as you reach the southern side of the eastern Black Sea mountains. Along with the landscape, the towns and villages change: Black Sea towns look vaguely Balkan, while places higher up appear much more Central Asian.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The eastern Black Sea has a culture very much its own and, as a traveller, chances are that your first experience of the region's unique character will be through your stomach – local cuisine entertains a number of treasured taste sensations you won't come across anywhere else.

For a start, the Black Sea peoples have a reverence for cabbage only surpassed by certain Eastern Europeans, and no trip would be complete without sampling *labana sarması* (stuffed cabbage rolls) or *labana lobia* (cabbage and beans), fibre-rich and surprisingly tasty dishes unique to the coast.

Also very popular are *muhlama* (or *mihlama*) and *kuymak*, both types of thick molten cheese served in a metal dish, much like a fondue but without the fatty dips. Even if you scoop it up with bread, that much heavy dairy can sit on your stomach – it's best experienced in the mountain villages of the Kaçkars, where it's cooked with egg for a lighter effect.

Whatever you think of these rarefied savoury treats, you can't sniff at *laz böreği*, a delicious flaky pastry layered with confectioner's custard. Like most Turkish desserts, it doesn't take much to be addictive!

Snow can be seen in all months except perhaps July, August and September.

Gümüşhane, about 145km south of Trabzon, is a small town in a mountain valley with a few simple travellers' services but not much to stop for except the scenery.

By the time you reach the provincial capital of **Bayburt**, 195km from Trabzon, you're well into the rolling steppe and low mountains of the high Anatolian plateau. A dry, desolate place, Bayburt has a big medieval fortress.

The road from Bayburt passes through rolling green farm country with poplar trees and flocks of brown-fleeced sheep. In early summer wild flowers are everywhere.

Exactly 33km past Bayburt is the **Kop Geçidi** (Kop Pass) at an altitude of 2370m; if you've got your own vehicle, it's worth stopping for the views. From Kop Geçidi, the open road to Erzurum offers fast, easy travelling.

UZUNGÖL

☎ 0462 / pop 2800

Uzungöl used to be an idyllic lakeside village backed by forested mountains. It still has the idyllic setting, but it has been somewhat spoilt by a handful of tacky hotels to the east and pollution scares in the lake itself. Nevertheless, the place can make a restful day trip or overnight stop; trekkers can also use it as a base for day hikes in the Soğanlı Mountains to the lakes around Demirkapı (Holdizen).

If you do want to stay, try the **Ensar Motel & Restaurant** (☎ 656 6321; www.ensarmotel.com, in Turkish; Fatih Caddesi 18; s/d €25/35), an attractive resort with above-average amenities, good-value rooms

and a lovely setting near the lake. Everything is wood panelled except the roof, and there's traditional decoration throughout.

A couple of minibuses travel daily between Trabzon and Uzungöl; Ulusoy has a daily service at 9am in summer (€8.50 return). Alternatively, take a Rize-bound dolmuş to Of (€2) and then wait for another heading inland. Eyce Tours (p551) runs regular day trips from Trabzon.

RİZE

☎ 0464 / pop 78,000

About 75km east of Trabzon, Rize lies at the heart of Turkey's tea-plantation area. The steep hillsides above the town are thickly planted with tea, which is cured, dried and blended here, then shipped throughout the country. Though lacking any truly significant monuments, it's not short on eating options and you can easily while away a few hours over a cuppa.

Orientation & Information

The main square, Atatürk Anıtı, where you'll find a beautifully reconstructed old PTT and the Şeyh Camii, is 200m inland from the coastal road, Menderes Bulvarı. The hotels are to the east of the main square along or just off Cumhuriyet Caddesi, which runs one block inland and almost parallel to Menderes Bulvarı. The otogar is also along Cumhuriyet Caddesi, about 1km northwest of the main square.

The friendly, helpful **tourist office** (☎ 213 0408; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri 15 May–15 Sep) is on the main square next to the PTT. **Matrix Internet**

Café (Kamburoğlu Sokak; per hr €0.55; ☎ 10am–11pm) is just off Atatürk Caddesi.

Sights

Up the hill behind the tourist office is the **Rize museum** (☎ 214 0235; Ulubatlı Sokak; admission €1.10; ☎ 9am–noon & 1–4pm Tue–Sun), a fine reconstructed Ottoman house with a lovely *serander* beside it. The rooms upstairs have been decorated in traditional style, with a few artefacts and a huge wireless set to remind you that the later Ottomans were still part of the modern age. Mannequins model Laz costumes from central Rize and Hemşin costumes from around Ayder.

One of Rize's magnets is the magnificent **tea garden** set amid a fragrant flower garden, 900m above town via the steep road behind the Şeyh Camii (it's signposted 'Ziraat Çay ve Botanik Parkı'). Enjoy the smashing views while taking pleasure in a cup of tea (€0.30) – a typical Rizeli experience. A taxi from outside the mosque will drive you here for €2.

The other key feature is the town's ancient **castle**, built by the Genoese on the steep hill at the back of town. Signs point the way up Kale Sokak from Atatürk Caddesi.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Milano (☎ 213 0028; milano_hotel@hotmail.com; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 169; s/d €23/34, ste €61; ☎) It's no more fashionable or Italian than a döner kebab, but this tiled option east of the centre is comfortable enough to forgive the lack of professional finish.

Otel Kaçkar (☎ 213 1490; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 101; s/d/tr €23/39/45; ☎) Just off the main square, look out

for the Kaçkar's mosaic facade, which bids you in to sample the neat, unfussy but adequate rooms. There's a *hamam* round the back.

Dergah Pastaneleri (☎ 532 1704; Deniz Caddesi 19; dishes €2–3; ☎ 9am–10pm) This popular *pastane* (patisserie) has been tormenting the sweet-toothed and weak-willed since 1985, and does a mean ice cream (€4 for one kilo!). There's also an extensive snack menu covering breakfast, salads, pizza, spaghetti and sandwiches. There's a smaller second branch at Atatürk Caddesi 356. Wireless internet access is available.

Bekiroğlu (☎ 217 1380; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 161; mains €2–4; ☎ 9am–10pm) One of a number of family terrace restaurants on the pedestrian strip south of the coast road, the Bekiroğlu doesn't do things by halves, with multiple shrubs, breadbaskets piled a foot high and meat spits like elephants' ankles.

Getting There & Away

Although Rize does have an otogar, many of the buses and dolmuşes plying the coastal highway drop passengers off along the seafront, where you can also flag down one of the frequent minibuses to Hopa (€4, 1½ hours) and Trabzon (€2.80, one hour, every 25 minutes). In summer there are daily direct services to Ayder (€5.50, 1¼ hours), otherwise take an eastbound minibus to Pazar (€1.80) and change.

HOPA

☎ 0466 / pop 24,000

Like many border service towns, Hopa, 165km east of Trabzon and 30km southwest of the

ONE OF THE LAZ

Rize is the last major centre of the Laz people (see p48), a loose community numbered at around 250,000, of which 150,000 still speak the Caucasian-based Lazuri language. Known for their colourful traditional costumes and *lazeburi* folk music, you can see Laz cultural performances at any major local festival in the Rize region.

However, calling someone Laz is nowhere near as straightforward as it might seem. The Turkish Laz strenuously dispute any kind of categorisation that would lump them in with their Georgian counterparts; on the other hand, with many Turks using Laz as a simple catch-all term for anyone living east of Samsun, they're just as keen to differentiate themselves from other coastal denizens and shrug off the stereotype of the anchovy-munching 'Laz fisherman', butt of countless local jokes.

To confuse the issue still further, rumours have circulated of a 'Laz Homeland Party' (Lazuri Dobadona Partiya), supposedly founded in 1999 to press claims for autonomy. As the only evidence of this is on the internet, and as even the Laz themselves seem totally divided on who counts as Laz anyway, it's likely this is just another bit of coastal humour!

border into Georgia, is a mildly depressing pit stop, best appreciated on a sweaty grey day with a bad rakı hangover (since that's what it'll feel like anyway). You're only likely to want to stay here if you're heading to or from Georgia and have arrived too late to move on. It has all the standard amenities – a couple of banks with ATMs, internet cafés, a PTT and, of course, the otogar. Note that Hopa's exchange offices give lousy rates for Georgian lari, knowing that you won't be able to change them anywhere else.

Sleeping & Eating

Otel Ustabas (☎ 351 4507; Ortahopa Caddesi; s/d €11/22; 🚻) The town's best central budget deal, with oppressive carpets and missing shower heads offset by simple comforts and a café downstairs.

Otel Cihan (☎ 351 4897; hotelcihan@ttnet.net.tr; Ortahopa Caddesi 36; s/d €23/28) This towering yellow block offers a bar and roof restaurant along with the small rooms. It's about 300m along the coast road, next to a petrol station.

Peronti Otel (☎ 351 7663; www.peronti-otel.com; Turgay Ciner Caddesi 78; s/d €46/69; 🚻) Easily the fanciest option in town, despite the faintly ridiculous statues outside and abandoned maritime theme within. Facilities include a disco bar, American bar, barber, restaurant and room service.

Green Garden (☎ 351 4277; Cumhuriyet Caddesi; mains €1.10-4; 🍷 9am-10pm) Does exactly what it says on the tin, with two terraces and a brick dining room dishing up pide and kebabs in the small municipal park.

Getting There & Away

The otogar is on the western side of the Sundura Çayı, on the road to Artvin. Direct buses from Hopa to Erzurum (€14, six hours) leave in the morning. There are also regular buses or minibuses to Artvin (€5.60, 1½ hours), Rize (€4, 1½ hours) and Trabzon (€7.50, 3½ hours). For Kars (€17, 11 hours), there's only one direct bus, leaving in the morning.

Frequent minibuses for Sarp (€2.80) and the Georgian border leave from the petrol station beside the Otel Cihan and the stand at the Sundura Çayı junction north of the otogar. Trabzon–Tiflis buses also pass through Hopa, some going via the Posof border crossing (€17, 10 hours). For more details on crossing to Georgia, see p675.

KAÇKAR MOUNTAINS

The Kaçkar Mountains (Kaçkar Dağları) form a rugged range bordered by the Black Sea coast to the north and the Çoruh River to the south. The range stretches for about 30km, from south of Rize almost to Artvin at its northeastern end. Dense forest covers the lower valleys, but above 2100m grasslands carpet the passes and plateaus, and the jagged ranges are studded with lakes and alpine summer *yayla* (villages).

The Kaçkars are becoming increasingly visited for their trekking opportunities. The highest point, **Mt Kaçkar** (Kaçkar Dağı; 3937m), with a glacier on its northern face, is popular with trekkers, but the northeastern ranges around the peak of **Altıparmak** (3310m) are also popular. You could visit the Kaçkars on a day trip, but you'll get much more from it if you allow at least three days to explore.

ACTIVITIES

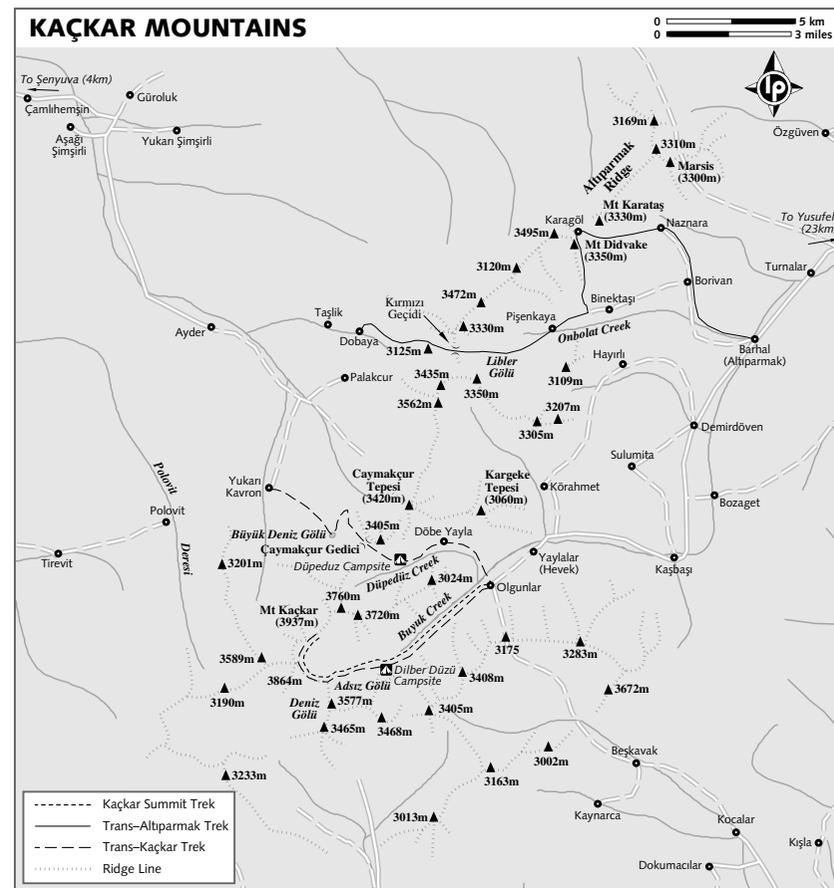
Trekking

Trekking is the main reason people come to the Kaçkars, and there are innumerable walks you could do. Talk to locals and the trekking guides to create your own adventure.

Note that the trekking season in this region is very short, and you will only be able to do the higher mountain routes between mid-July and mid-August, when the snowline is highest. From mid-May to mid-September there are still plenty of walks you can do on the lower slopes and dozens of little mountain villages where you can catch a slice of authentic Kaçkar life.

One of the most popular multiday trips is the **Trans-Kaçkar** trek, described in detail in the Trekking chapter, p85. The trek to the **Kaçkar Summit** by its southern face takes an easy three days, but may require specialist snow equipment. The three- to four-day **Trans-Altıparmak** route is similar to the Trans-Kaçkar, except that it crosses the Altıparmak range and doesn't climb the summit. If you stay in **Barhal (Altıparmak)** you could trek for four to five sweaty hours up to **Karagöl**, camp overnight, and return the next day.

Most people base themselves in Ayder or Çamlıhemşin, and start treks from the eastern flanks of the range at Barhal (Altıparmak), Yaylalar (Hevek) or Olgunlar. **Day walks** around the slopes and lakes are possible from Yukarı



Kavron, Caymakçur and Avusor, all served by dolmuş from Ayder. At Yukarı Kavron, try asking for Mehmet Ali, a guide in his 70s known locally as the 'king of Kaçkar'.

TREKKING GUIDES

Although some people are happy heading off into the mountains alone, it's a good idea to hire a local who knows the tracks. The walks are mostly unsigned, and misty weather conditions can put paid to your schedule, let alone your sense of direction. If you ask around at the pensions you should be able to find someone willing to go with you for around €30 a day. You may also want to hire a mule to carry your luggage (around €20 per day).

You should bring a good tent, stove and sleeping bag, but you could get away with just bringing walking boots and warm clothes provided you're going with one of the all-inclusive trekking operators.

For fully guided tours, including guide fee, tents, bedding, and all transport and food, expect to pay between €30 and €60 per day from Ayder, depending on group size (a minimum number often applies). A one-week trek should cost around €300, all included.

Reliable English-speaking guides include the following:
Adnan Pirikoğlu (☎ 0464-657 2021; adnanpirikoglu@hotmail.com) Experienced mountain guide who knows the area like the back of his hand, based at the Pirikoğlu Aile Lokantasi in Ayder year-round.

Ali Şahin (☎ 0464-651 7348) Based at the Şahin Pansiyon in Yukarı Kavron, on a plateau south of Ayder.
Mehmet Demirci (☎ 0464-657 2153) A jovial local entrepreneur offering day walks, longer treks, Jeep safaris, biking trips and other activities. Ask at Türkü Tourism (right) in Çamlıhemşin or the Fora Pansiyon in Ayder (opposite).

Most pension owners will happily help you organise a trek. There are also mountain guides in Yusufeli, Tekkale and Barhal, on the southern side of the range (see p571).

Other Activities

White-water rafting is possible in July and August on the modest rapids west of Çamlıhemşin; ask around the hotels or at Dağuraft on the main road, though experienced rafters are better off heading to the more exciting waters near Yusufeli (p572).

Some **winter sports** such as cross-country skiing are also possible in the region, but as there are few people around outside the trekking season, this is best organised in advance.

ÇAMLIHEMŞİN

☎ 0464 / pop 2400

At 300m, 20km off the coast road, Çamlıhemşin can be described as a transition point, or a kicking-off point. As the mist and drizzle should tell you, you've already left the ambience of the coastal zone, but you're still not really in the Kaçkars until you start adding a bit of altitude on the road up to Ayder.

As you head along the valley towards the village, you'll pass several ancient **humpback bridges** across the Fırtına Çayı (Storm Stream), some of which were restored for the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish

Republic in 1998. There are a couple of camping spots and a rafting outfit along the road between here and the coast.

Çamlıhemşin itself is essentially a functional village with the only ATM in the Kaçkars, a place to stock up on provisions or grab a bite in the handful of cheap eateries. For information and trekking arrangements, call in at the **Türkü Tourism Travel Agency** (☎ 651 7230; www.turkutour.com; İnönü Caddesi 47), sharing the tiny Türk Telekom office.

As well as the more basic cafés, **Yeşilvadi** (☎ 651 7282; İnönü Caddesi; meals around €6), by the Ayder bridge, offers excellent fresh trout dinners, local dishes and mezes in its conservatory. Just outside town on the road to Şenyuva, **Kervan 53** (☎ 418 0646; meals around €6) has brighter adobe-style décor (with fountain) and an even better riverside spot, used mainly for tour groups.

Just beyond Çamlıhemşin the road forks and you'll have to decide whether to go straight ahead (signposted 'Zil Kale & Çat') for Şenyuva or left (signposted 'Ayder Kaplıcaları') for Ayder (17km).

ŞENYUVA

☎ 0464

Şenyuva is simply beautiful and atmospheric, and even getting here is a treat, passing through verdant valleys crisscrossed with winch wires for hoisting goods up to the remote mountain houses. Pension owners will be happy to help you organise hikes in the surrounding area.

You can base yourself at the friendly **Otel Doğa** (☎ 651 7455; half board per person €20), by the river about 4km from Çamlıhemşin. It is run by the well-travelled İdris Duman who speaks French and English. The rooms are simple but salubrious, mostly with private bathrooms.

Some have balconies overlooking the river and there's a spacious lounge and a restaurant.

Around 2km further on, in Şenyuva village itself, is the leafy **Fırtına Pansiyon** (☎ 653 3111; pansiyon@firtinavadisi.com; half board per person €25), with two cute bungalows near the river and cheerfully painted rooms in former school buildings, all with shared bathrooms. The lounge room is inviting.

A few hundred metres north is the thin, arched **Şenyuva Köprüsü** (Şenyuva Bridge, 1696). From here the road continues for 9km to the spectacular sited ruins of **Zil Castle** (Zil Kale), a round stone tower on a stark rock base, surrounded by lush rhododendron forests – it's a superb walk, but tough going for cars. Another 15km will lead you to **Çat** (1250m), a mountain hamlet used as a trekking base, where you'll find a shop, a couple of seasonal pensions and the start of the even rougher roads into the heart of the mountains.

Only one minibus a day runs between Şenyuva and Çamlıhemşin, so you may have to walk (6km) or take a taxi for about €6 each way.

AYDER

☎ 0464

The hub of the Kaçkar tourist industry, Ayder is a high-pasture village enjoying a glorious valley-side setting at 1300m, with snow-capped mountains above and waterfalls cascading to the river below. Despite a few painful concrete buildings thrown up to meet visitor demand, the charming alpine-chalet look still predominates, and new buildings must now be in 'traditional style' (ie sheathed in wood).

Ayder really only functions during the trekking season, which runs from mid-May to mid-September. At other times there may only be a few local families living here, and even in early May you might find nothing open and no public transport to get you back out. Conversely, in August the village can hardly cope with the flood of domestic tourists, especially at weekends, when most places will be full by mid-afternoon.

Orientation & Information

About 4.5km below Ayder is the gate marking the entrance to the Kaçkar Dağları Milli Parkı (Kaçkar Mountains National Park), where you must pay an admission fee of €2 per vehicle in season.

The nominal centre of the village has a couple of restaurants, a bakery, supermarket, *tekel bayii* (off-licence), two internet cafés, the minibus office and bus stop, a car-hire office and several gift shops. The hotels are scattered for about 1km along the road either side of the centre. There is nowhere to change money.

Sights & Activities

Most people use Ayder as a base for trekking in the mountains, but even if you don't have time to do that it's still worth popping up here for a day or so to get your fill of the wonderful scenery. Wildlife enthusiasts should note that rare Caucasian black grouse, salamanders and brown bears all live in the national park, though it'd be a miracle to see them anywhere near the village.

Post-trek muscle relief can be had at the spotless **kaplıca** (hot springs; ☎ 657 2102; admission €4.50, private cabin €14; ☎ 7am-8pm), where the water reaches temperatures of 56°C (133°F); it's said to be good for ulcers, skin complaints, cuts and allergies.

Sleeping

Many of Ayder's pensions are set halfway up the hill next to the road, reached by narrow, slanting paths; bear in mind that getting back up to them can be tricky when the mist rolls in!

Zirve Ahşap Pansiyon (☎ 657 2162; s/d with shared bathroom €8.50/17) One for the budget crowd, this hillside house doesn't have the most stellar standards, but there's a kitchen for guests, it's friendly and English is spoken. Breakfast costs €2.50.

Fora Pansiyon (☎ 657 2153; turku@turkutour.com; s/d half board €20/40) Türkü Tourism's original hillside family pension, provides a homely sitting room, simple pine-clad rooms, shared bathrooms, balconies, laundry and a terrace with good views. Ask here about treks, activities and visits to ekodanıtap (see opposite).

Nehirim Pansiyon (☎ 657 2040; adsiz_masal@hotmail.com; s/d/tr €20/40/60) A new addition to the hillside cluster; you can almost smell the pine sap in the pristine rooms. The manager's a former rafting champion turned professional instructor, and can advise on white-water trips across the region.

Kuşpuni Pansiyon (☎ 657 2052; ali_the_conqueror@hotmail.com; s/d €23/46) Another very appealing family-run chalet-pension, it revels in a stove-heated lounge with decent views and hearty meals. It's run by Buklamania Tours, who

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

ekodanıtap (☎ 651 7230; www.ekodanıtap.com, in Turkish) The latest venture from Türkü Tourism, this is a fantastic self-built sustainable eco-camp hidden away up a steep hill off the main road just west of Çamlıhemşin. The four solar-powered wooden cabins are amazingly well turned-out, with TV, fridge and hot showers; owner Mehmet has big plans for the place, intending to base a range of year-round local activities and excursions here, and seemingly half his extended family are involved with the project. It was only just getting up and running at the time of research, so prices are not yet fixed – expect to pay around €30 per person per night, including meals (and, probably, a healthy dose of raki). The plot is 200m off the road, in a perfectly secluded clearing at the end of an overgrown track; you've got no chance of finding it on your own, so enquire in advance at Türkü Tours or the Fora Pansiyon in Ayder.

HEMŞİN CULTURE

If you visit Ayder over a summer weekend you may get the chance to witness some of the last surviving Hemşin culture (see p48). In the meadows of the town groups of Hemşin holidaymakers often gather to dance the *horon*, a cross between the conga and the hokey-cokey set to the distinctive whining skirl of the *tulum*, a type of goatskin bagpipe. Even if you don't run into one of these parties, you'll see women all around the mountains wearing splendid headdresses, often incongruously matched with cardigans, long skirts and running shoes or woollen boots.

Whether you realise it or not, you'll probably also *hear* some traces of Hemşin heritage: the peculiar Armenian-derived dialect is still commonly spoken in Çamlıhemşin and Ayder. Listen out for Ayderlis softening their g's ('jel' and 'jit' instead of 'gel' and 'git') and aspirating their k's like Scottish ch's ('Amlachit' instead of Amlakit).

specialise in trekking and activity tours for the domestic market but can happily cater for foreign visitors.

Yeşil Vadi Otel (☎ 657 2050; www.ayderyesilvadi.com in Turkish; s/d €23/46) Clad in more pine than a Swedish sauna, this is a great central option by the main road with rustic timber rooms, heavy duvets and impeccable bathrooms. Many rooms boast valley views, and the restaurant comes recommended.

Otel Ayder Haşimoğlu (☎ 657 2037; www.hasimogluotel.com; s/d/tr €27/54/81) Run by Ayder Turizm, who also operate the hot springs, this big posh pine place is by the river, 100m downhill from the centre (follow the path by the town mosque). It's popular with tour groups, and offers plenty for your buck. AT also rents 'vilas' (half board from €85) next to the *kaplıca*, sleeping at least four people.

Eating & Drinking

Many people eat in their pensions, but there are a few other options if you want to venture out.

Nazlı Çiçek (☎ 657 2130; mains €3-6) Right in the centre of the village, this charming old house specialises in freshly caught trout, but also whips up a limited range of standards and Black Sea specialities such as *muhlama*.

Çiçe Restaurant (☎ 657 2171; mains €3-6) Next door to the Nazlı Çiçek, it plagiarises its rival's menu shamelessly, but adds live music in place of traditional décor.

Horon Bar & Restaurant (☎ 433 5858; mains €2.80-4.50) Back down the hill, this is one of Ayder's few licensed premises, frequented by a predominantly male crowd.

Getting There & Away

From mid-June to mid-September frequent dolmuşes run between Pazar on the coast to Ayder (€3.50, one hour) via Ardeşen and Çamlıhemşin. There are also sometimes direct services from Rize. On summer Sundays the trickle of minibuses up to Ayder turns into a flood. Otherwise, passengers are mostly shoppers from the villages, so dolmuşes descend in the morning and return from Pazar in the early afternoon.

In season, morning dolmuşes also run from Ayder to other mountain villages, including Galer Düzü, Avusor, Yukarı Kavron and Ceymakcur. Check with locals for exact schedules.

Even in the low season there are still four minibus services daily between Pazar and Çamlıhemşin. A taxi between Ayder and Çamlıhemşin costs around €20.

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