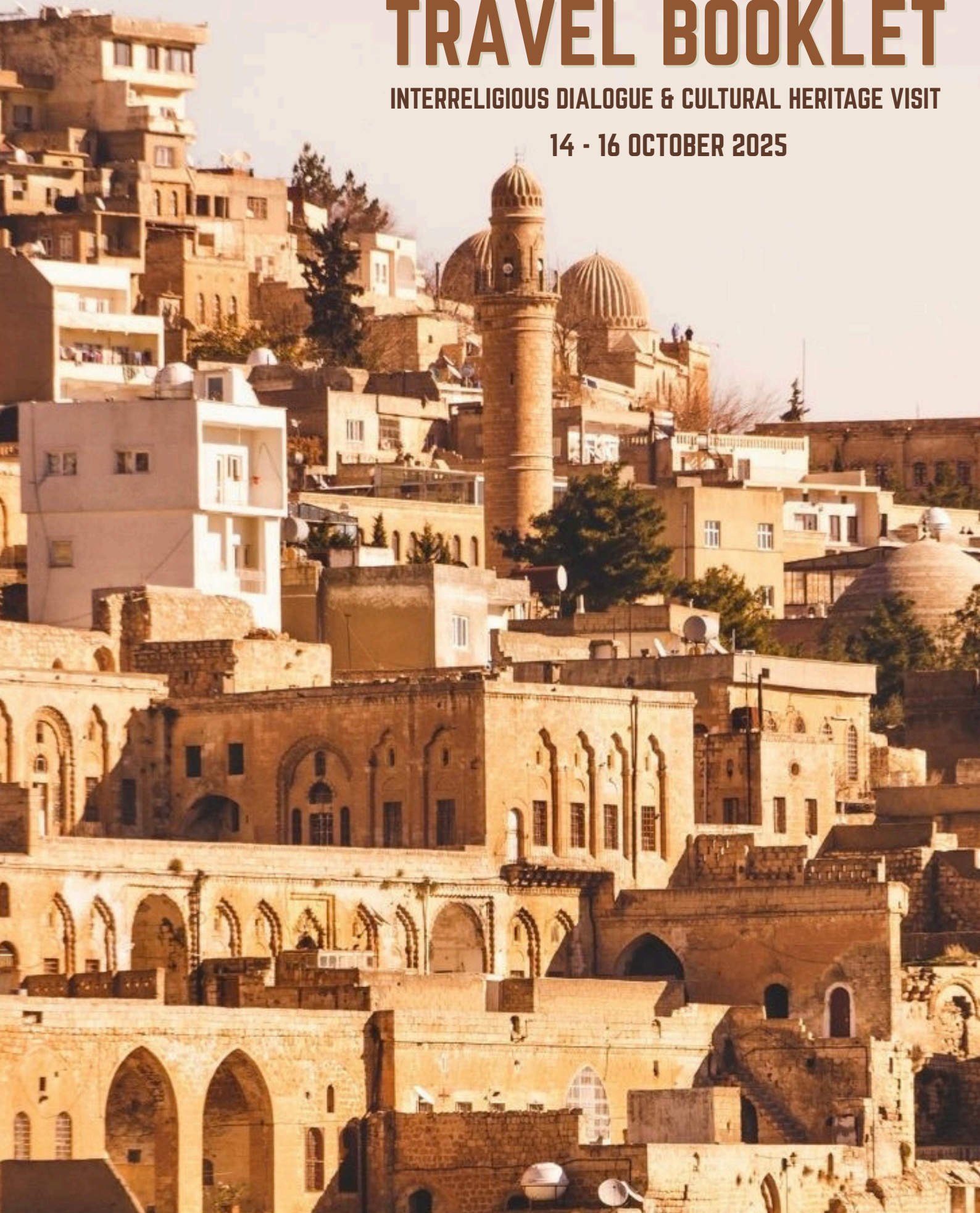


TRAVEL BOOKLET

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE & CULTURAL HERITAGE VISIT

14 - 16 OCTOBER 2025



DEAR FELLOWS,

This guidebook has been carefully designed to help you prepare for your field visit to Şanlıurfa and Mardin, two of Türkiye's most culturally rich and historically significant cities. The visit will allow you to gain first-hand exposure to regional peacebuilding, migration, and development initiatives while experiencing the deep heritage and hospitality of Southeastern Türkiye.

OBJECTIVE OF THE VISIT

The primary purpose of this visit is to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of local peacebuilding and development efforts in Southeastern Türkiye.
- Observe integration practices and challenges faced by refugee and host communities.
- Study sustainable rural development and agricultural initiatives as models for community resilience.
- Foster intercultural learning by engaging with local organizations, community leaders, and civil society actors.
- Strengthen fellows' understanding of the socioeconomic and cultural dynamics shaping peace and development in the MENA and Anatolian regions.

ABOUT ŞANLIURFA

The name Şanlıurfa originates from the ancient city of Edessa, later known simply as Urfa. In 1984, the Turkish government added the prefix “Şanlı”—meaning “glorious”—to honor the city’s heroic resistance during the Turkish War of Independence, making Şanlıurfa translate to “Glorious Urfa.” Şanlıurfa is one of the world’s oldest continuously inhabited cities. It is believed to be the birthplace of Prophet Abraham and is home to Göbeklitepe, the world’s oldest known temple complex dating back over 11,000 years. The city is an important cultural and religious center, blending Arab, Kurdish, and Turkish influences. Şanlıurfa also plays a key role in Türkiye’s agricultural economy and hosts a significant refugee population, making it an ideal destination for understanding humanitarian and development challenges in the region.

ABOUT MARDIN

Perched on a hill overlooking the Mesopotamian plains, Mardin is famed for its distinctive stone architecture, multicultural heritage, and harmonious coexistence of different faiths and ethnicities. The city is home to Syriac, Arab, Kurdish, and Turkish communities, symbolizing peace through diversity. Mardin’s cobblestone alleys, ancient monasteries, and vibrant bazaars reflect centuries of shared history and dialogue among civilizations.

TRAVEL ITINERARY

TIME	14.10.2025	15.10.2025	16.10.2025
06:00	Flight from IST-URFA		
08:00	Arrival in Urfa	Breakfast at Hotel	Breakfast at Hotel
09:00	Breakfast at Urfa Bahcesehir College	Check-out	Check-out
10:00	Visit 1: Yerelden Kalkınma Derneği	Cultural Heritage Visit: Göbeklitepe (Meeting with Local Rotarians)	Cultural Heritage Visit: Dayrulzafaran Monastery, Kasımiye Madrasah and More
11:00	Visit 2: Genç STEM Derneği	Road to Mardin - 3 hrs	
12:30	Visit 3: Şanlıurfa Belediye Kültür Daire Başkanlığı, Merve Ofluoğlu		Visit: Bahçeşehir Collage Mardin
13:30	Lunch	Visit 1 and Lunch: MOKİD	Lunch
14:30	Hotel Check In and Rest		Free Time in City
15:30	City Tour: Balıklıgöl - Archeology Museum	Visit 2: ÇATOM Kızıltepe	
16:30	Free Time	Free Time in Mardin's historic streets	Dinner
17:00			
19:00	Dinner (estimated time)	Dinner & Check-In	Flight to Istanbul

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

1. TRANSPORTATION

- Flight: Istanbul → Şanlıurfa
- Intercity Travel: Şanlıurfa → Mardin (3 hours by bus)
- Local Travel: Arranged via private shuttle/bus for group mobility
- Transportation will be arranged through Taxis. All related expenses will be covered by the center.

2. ACCOMMODATION

- Fellows will stay in single rooms at:
- Şanlıurfa: Sandra Hotel
- Mardin: Yay Grand Hotel

3. WEATHER AND CLOTHING

- Daytime: 20–25°C
- Evening: 10–13°C
- Light, breathable clothing for daytime
- A light jacket or sweater for the evening
- Comfortable shoes for walking on uneven cobblestone streets
- Modest attire for religious and official visits (cover shoulders and knees)

4. TRAVEL PREPARATION

- The journey from Şanlıurfa to Mardin will take approximately 3 hours.
- Fellows are advised to:
- Bring snacks, water, and personal medications.
- Keep headphones, a book, or notes for the journey.
- Stay seated and follow staff guidance during travel.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

5. ETIQUETTE REMINDER

- Please be mindful of local customs and respect sacred sites.
- During official visits and meetings, avoid using mobile phones unless absolutely necessary.
- Be punctual and attentive during briefings and discussions.
- Photography is permitted in most areas, but please ask for consent before taking photos of individuals or religious figures.

6. FIELD VISIT SAFETY

- Always stay with the group during travel and visits.
- If you wish to move separately, inform the directors beforehand.
- Carry your Passport/ID cards and hotel card at all times.
- Save the contact details of at least one staff member on your phone.

7. EMERGENCY CONTACTS

- General Emergency - 112
- Assoc. Prof. Yüksel Alper Ecevit (Executive Director)
+90 532 743 58 92
- Erdi Aydın (Administrative Director)
+90 537 528 04 44
- Zeycan Karaarslan (Assistant Specialist)
+90 538 204 70 85

OVERVIEW OF KEY CULTURAL SITES

GÖBEKLITEPE (ŞANLIURFA)

Göbeklitepe, located about 15 kilometers northeast of Şanlıurfa, is recognized as the world's oldest known temple complex, dating back to around 9600 BCE—predating Stonehenge and the Egyptian pyramids by several millennia. The site features massive T-shaped limestone pillars arranged in circular enclosures, believed to have been used for communal rituals. Archaeologists suggest that Göbeklitepe represents the earliest evidence of organized religion and collective human identity, marking a transformative period in humanity's transition from hunter-gatherer societies to settled agricultural communities. For fellows, visiting Göbeklitepe is not only a glimpse into ancient spirituality but also a reflection on how shared beliefs and cooperation have always been central to peace and human development.

BALIKLIGÖL (ŞANLIURFA)

Located in the heart of Şanlıurfa, Balıklıgöl, also known as the Pool of Sacred Fish, is a site deeply rooted in Abrahamic tradition. It is believed to be the place where Prophet Abraham was cast into the fire by King Nimrod, only for the flames to turn into water and the burning logs into fish—symbols of divine protection and peace. The site is surrounded by historic mosques, Ottoman-era architecture, and vibrant bazaar streets, making it a place where faith, culture, and daily life coexist harmoniously. Feeding the sacred carp fish is seen as an act of blessing, and the tranquil atmosphere around Balıklıgöl invites quiet contemplation about resilience, faith, and the spiritual unity that transcends centuries and religions.

OVERVIEW OF KEY CULTURAL SITES

DAYRULZAFARAN MONASTERY (MARDIN)

Perched just outside Mardin, Dayrulzafaran Monastery (also known as the Monastery of Mor Hananyo) stands as one of the oldest Syriac Orthodox monasteries in the world, dating back to the 5th century. Once the patriarchal seat of the Syriac Orthodox Church, it remains a living center of faith, language, and learning. The monastery's golden stone façade and sunlit courtyards symbolize the resilience of Christian communities in the region who have preserved their faith and traditions for over 1,500 years amidst changing political and cultural landscapes. Within its ancient chapel, the monastery embodies a message of spiritual endurance and coexistence, serving as a tangible example of interfaith heritage that continues to define Mardin's identity as a city of peace and diversity.

KASIMIYE MEDRESE (MARDIN)

Built during the 15th century under the rule of the Artuqid dynasty, the Kasımiye Medrese is one of Mardin's most remarkable architectural masterpieces. Functioning as a theological and scientific school, the medrese (Islamic educational complex) represents the intellectual and spiritual life of the medieval Islamic world. Its open courtyard, central fountain, and symbolic water channel—flowing from birth to death—offer a powerful metaphor for the human journey through knowledge and faith. The site exemplifies the harmony between religion, architecture, and learning, reflecting how education was seen as a path to enlightenment and societal peace. Visiting Kasımiye Medrese provides fellows with a deep sense of how wisdom and spirituality were intertwined in the historical pursuit of coexistence and development.

LOCAL NGOS AND ORGANIZATIONS

YERELDEN KALKINMA DERNEĞİ (ŞANLIURFA)

Yerelden Kalkınma Derneği (Local Development Association) seeks to mobilize and harness local potential to promote holistic development in Şanlıurfa, especially focusing on disadvantaged youth and refugee communities. The association carries out training programs in areas such as entrepreneurship, digital skills, social media, and capacity building. It also implements projects aimed at improving social cohesion, promoting citizen participation, and integrating Syrian refugees into social and economic life in the region.

GENÇ STEM DERNEĞİ

Genç STEM Eğitim ve Araştırma Derneği (Young STEM Education & Research Association) works to expand access to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) education and innovation opportunities for youth across Türkiye, particularly in underserved or rural areas. They organize workshops, training, and projects that encourage hands-on learning and digital literacy, aiming to reduce educational inequality and foster future technology leaders.

ŞANLIURFA BELEDİYE KÜLTÜR VE TURİZM DAİRE BAŞKANLIĞI (ŞANLIURFA MUNICIPALITY, CULTURE & TOURISM DEPARTMENT)

The Culture and Tourism Department of Şanlıurfa Municipality is responsible for preserving, promoting, and managing the city's cultural heritage, museums, festivals, and tourism assets. Through this municipal unit, the city organizes cultural programming, heritage conservation, and public events to strengthen Şanlıurfa's identity and appeal to visitors. The department also collaborates with local stakeholders to manage historical sites and promote Şanlıurfa's touristic potential.

LOCAL NGOS AND ORGANIZATIONS

MOKID (MARDIN ORTAK KADIN İŞBİRLİĞİ DERNEĞİ)

MOKID (Mardin Joint Women's Cooperation Association) focuses on supporting women and girls, particularly refugees and marginalized women, in the Mardin region. The organization provides social, psychological, and legal counseling in native languages, and carries out awareness-raising through educational programs and seminars. MOKID has a local address in Mardin and reaches out via community-level partnerships. Its mission centers on promoting equality, protection from violence, and social inclusion for women in mixed communities.

ÇATOM KIZILTEPE (GAP ÇOK AMAÇLI TOPLUM MERKEZİ, KIZILTEPE, MARDIN)

ÇATOM (Multipurpose Community Center) in Kızıltepe is part of the GAP (Southeastern Anatolia Project) social infrastructure network. The center offers a wide variety of programs: psychosocial support, social cohesion, cultural-social events, women's handicrafts, preschool education, and training classes. It is a local hub for social development, striving to empower women and youth, bridge community divides, and support refugees and host populations through skill-building, social support, and cultural programs.

**WE WISH YOU ALL AN INSIGHTFUL,
EDUCATIONAL, JOYFUL, AND
TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE!**