

Language and culture guide

Turkish

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Türkiye and Turkish language and culture that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About Türkiye

The Republic of Türkiye is uniquely situated in both Asia and Europe, sharing borders with Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq and Syria. The population of Türkiye is 80 million and the capital is Ankara. There are large communities of Turks living outside Türkiye, notably in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Southeast Europe and Central Asia. Australia has a significant Turkish population with the Turkish migration to Australia dating all the way back to the early 19th century.

Turkish is the official language of Türkiye and one of the official languages of Cyprus. It is the most commonly spoken language of the Turkic language family. The total number of Turkish speakers worldwide is 90 million.

Language

Modern Turkish is based on the Turkic dialect spoken in Istanbul. The predecessor of modern Turkish was the Turkish language spoken during the Ottoman period. Ottoman Turkish incorporated many words from Arabic, Persian and Greek and used an Arabic alphabet. After the formation of the modern Turkish state in 1923, the Turkish language underwent major reforms. In 1928 the Latin alphabet was introduced for written Turkish. The alphabet was varied to meet the requirements of the language, with the modern-day alphabet consisting of 29 letters, with the letters q, x and w omitted, and ç, ş, ğ, ı, ö and ü added. Turkish is a phonetic language with each letter of the alphabet representing one sound.

Turkish uses vowel harmony, which means that there are rules about which vowel sounds can be used near each other. The basic word order in Turkish is subject-object-verb; for example, 'Ayşe pears ate' as opposed to 'Ayşe ate pears'. For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

Türkiye is often referred to as a 'bridge' between the East and the West, incorporating both Islamic and European influences. Türkiye has a majority Sunni Muslim population with a sizeable Shia community. The cultural landscape of Türkiye also incorporates elements from Greek, Armenian, Arabic, Georgian and Kurdish cultural traditions. Despite this diverse cultural makeup, the Turkish people are united in their love of football and food.

Politeness and customs

- The Turkish people are very hospitable and courteous.
- Turkish people shake hands if they are not well acquainted, while friends and family often kiss each other on both cheeks.
- When shaking hands, it is important to shake hands with all people present, starting with the elders. Turkish people shake hands again when leaving.
- The common Turkish greeting is 'Nasilsiniz' (How are you?) or 'Merhaba' (Hello). The Islamic greeting is 'Asalamu alaykum' (Peace be upon you).
- Never point the soles of your feet or shoes towards a person. When sitting, point your feet down or put them flat on the floor.
- Shoes are removed before entering Turkish homes.
- The Nazar is the blue, eye-shaped glass pendant that can be found hanging throughout Türkiye. It is believed to protect against the evil eye.

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Turkish cultural references, such as a mosaic tile, an apricot, a börek and an adana kebab. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.



Interesting topics

Animals

The animals of Türkiye include:

- hyenas
- kangals
- brown bears
- grey wolves
- Eurasian lynxes
- Caspian red deer
- red foxes
- loggerhead turtles
- storks
- caracals (a medium-sized wild cat)
- Eurasian otters.

Arts

- Textiles: Türkiye is renowned worldwide for its textiles and carpets. These beautiful carpets are hand-woven or knotted from wool, cotton or silk.
- Ceramics: the history of ceramic art in Türkiye dates back 10,000 years. One of the most distinct ceramic traditions is the brightly coloured Iznik tiles.
- Folk dance: there are many different traditional folk dances performed throughout Türkiye. The Halay is one example of a folk dance originating from central and south-eastern Türkiye. It is a group circle dance often performed at weddings. The Halay starts slow and speeds up. It is accompanied on the zurna (wind instrument) and davul (drum) while the singer leads the dance with poetic improvisation.

Food

- Kahvalti (breakfast) is a banquet-style meal that includes a wide range of foods such as simit (round bread roll with sesame seeds), peyniri (Turkish cheese), dips, olives, eggs, sucuk (Turkish sausage), fresh vegetables and thick yoghurt.
- Turkish çay (tea) is served black in distinctive, decorative glasses. It is drunk throughout the day and is an integral part of many social occasions.
- There are many varieties of delicious sweets in Türkiye such as baklava, Turkish delight and lokma (a doughnut coated in honey).
- Other popular Turkish dishes include köfte (meatballs), pide (Turkish pizza) and şiş kebab (skewered meat).



Interesting topics

Places

- Istanbul is the largest city in Türkiye and was the capital of the former Ottoman and Byzantine Empires. Old Town is the oldest part of the city. Many significant historical sites are located here, such as the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque.
- The Grand Bazaar, in Istanbul, is one of the world's largest indoor markets. It dates back to 1461 and has over 5,000 stalls.
- Türkiye is bordered by four different seas – the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara – and has over 8,000 kilometres of beautiful coastline.
- Antalya is a coastal city that sits on the Mediterranean against the backdrop of the Taurus Mountains. It is a popular resort city and is often referred to as the gateway to the Turkish Riviera.

Celebrations

- Ramazan (Ramadan) is the holy month for Muslims and is a time for prayer, fasting and feasting. In Türkiye, the end of Ramazan is marked by a three-day celebration called Ramazan Bayramı.
- The Whirling Dervishes Festival is an annual celebration held in the city of Konya to commemorate the teachings of the Sufi poet Rumi. At the heart of the festival is the ceremonial dance in which the dervishes spin around until they achieve inner peace.
- There are several public holidays to commemorate important events in the formation of the Turkish state. One such holiday is National Sovereignty and Children's Day, held on 23 April. This holiday celebrates the first day of the Turkish National Assembly and is also a celebration of children. Schools and groups of children take part in public performances to mark the occasion.

Note: This document contains content that has been gathered through independent research and consultation with subject matter experts. The figures and information included in this document should be reviewed for accuracy over time.



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