



The American Turkish Association of North Carolina (ATA-NC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting awareness of Turkish culture and sharing Turkish heritage throughout the state of North Carolina.

IF: How long has your group been in the Triangle area?

ATA-NC: The first organized activity of the Turks in the area was for the 1986 International Festival of Raleigh. Following, the ATA-NC was incorporated in late 1987.

IF: How do you pursue your objective of sharing Turkish culture?

ATA-NC: Today's ATA-NC organizes many classes and events to share Turkish culture, and also attends events throughout North Carolina. Our ongoing classes and educational activities include

- Turkish Children's School
- Turkish Language Classes for adults
- Turkish Cooking Classes
- Sewing Club
- Book Club
- Ebru (A Turkish Art) Classes & Demonstrations
- Demonstrations to K-12 Classes about Turkey and Turkish people
- Folk Dance Classes/Groups (Adult, Youth and Children)
- Music Classes/Groups (Classical & Pop Turkish Music)
- Story Time for Children (especially at libraries in the area)

Community Events ATA-NC regularly attends and/or organizes:

- International Festival of Raleigh
- Annual High Point Hidirellez Festival
- Annual Charlotte Turkish Festival
- Annual Nazim Hikmet Poetry Festival
- Greenville Festival
- Cary Lazy Daze Arts and Crafts Festival
- Cary Spring Daze Arts and Crafts Festival
- Raleigh Christmas Parade
- Raleigh Wide Open Parade

Social Events:

- Turkish Movie Nights
- Turkish Dinners
- Ladies Nights



Interest in our activities is increasing each day, and we are both expanding and planning new activities:

Just last year our organization's Charlotte Turks organized, and are becoming more and more independent in their activities. Our High Point extension is also an active group, and a similar group is being formed in Wilmington. We're also being contacted from nearby towns, like Fayetteville, on how to proceed.

Our Turkish Pop Music Group became operational again just last year. Currently we are in the final preparations of enhancing our "Turk Evi" (Turkish House) to serve also as an Art Gallery; the first exhibit is already scheduled for a Raleigh photographer who has been to Turkey and many other countries, and further exhibits (painting, pottery, etc) are being booked.

IF: How big is your Triangle-based community?

ATA-NC: We estimate that there are approximately 300 Turkish Families and 120 students attending colleges and universities in the area, and ATA-NCs membership list has about 120 families and 100 students throughout other areas of North Carolina.



IF: What are some interesting stories about your group?

ATA-NC: Over the years, we had many interesting stories. For example, we had people that met each other here. However, years later some of them realized they lived on the same street in their childhood in Turkey or they were class mates or even a few learned they are (distant) relatives.

Except for one or two, all Turkish children who grow up here are bilingual (we have trilinguals and even a four). They all are proud of that and they love to switch the language back and forth when they are talking to each other especially when there are "English only" children around them.

The Turks who have been here for an extended period (say 15-20 years) start to speak "Turkish" (= Turkish mixed with English): When they are speaking in Turkish, approximately 20% of their words are English words, especially if the word is for something that did not exist in Turkey and they learned it here.

IF: Can you share some information about where you come from?

ATA-NC: Most of the members of ATA-NC are from Republic of Turkey, which is located in both Asia and Europe. The main part is in Asia; a big peninsula called Anatolia bordered by the Black Sea to the north, the Aegean Sea to the west, and the Mediterranean Sea to the south. Neighbors to the east are Georgia, Armenia and Iran; on the south are Iraq and Syria. A much smaller part of Turkey is in Europe, bordering Bulgaria and Greece to its west. Anatolian and European parts are separated by the Sea of Marmara, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.



istanbul Eminönü ömer ATES

With such geography, climate changes drastically in Turkey depending on where you are. The north-eastern parts are mountainous and extremely cold in winter, but very nice during summertime. The south-east and central parts are far inland and experience extremes between winters (very cold) and summers (very hot). On the other hand, the coastal areas enjoy mild winters and summers.

The official language of Turkey is Turkish and all citizens speak Turkish. However, there are numerous ethnic groups in Turkey and those groups may also use their own dialect of Turkish or their own language in daily life. The Turks can also usually understand people from other Turkic countries (Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan ...).

The population density in Turkey is very high compared to the U.S.A. Hence, life is little bit different there. For example, land is very expensive, and most people live in high-rise apartments. You can not easily remodel your home or make additions, and even hanging artwork or a picture on a wall sometimes becomes challenging. Due to the



high population density, mass transit is significantly developed, and the majority of in-city transport is via busses, metro-trains and dolmus.

Dolmuses are something specific to Turkey; you cannot find them elsewhere in the world: Think a taxi cab, but running only on a predetermined route. Dolmuses wait for passengers at the main station until there are enough passengers to fill all seats. Once filled, they depart, and drop passengers and pick up new ones throughout their route.

IF: What are some challenges people from your culture face when coming to the US?

ATA-NC: Taxing, medical benefits/arrangements and social security are the unfamiliar things for Turks coming to the U.S.A.

In Turkey, all taxes are deducted from paychecks and ordinary Turkish citizens who work for someone else or for a company do not need to file a tax return.

There are no medical insurance companies in Turkey, but government health insurance services which the majority of the population can benefit from. If you need to see a doctor, you visit your choice and pay out of pocket at reasonable fees, or the government pays most of it. If you need to be hospitalized, public hospitals are the most common facilities and again the cost is affordable.

Retirement in Turkey is part of social security. There are no separate pensions or 401-K kinds of plans. Your social security payment is deducted from your paycheck, and when you reach a certain number of service years, you retire and your retirement salary kicks in.



IF: Please share any other information you would like readers to know about your culture:

ATA-NC: There are some misconceptions about Turks and Turkey that we would like to correct:

- 1) Camels are used only for tourist attractions; they are not part of daily life.
 - 2) Turkish language is not subset of Arabic and we use Latin characters to write.
- Otherwise:

1) Istanbul is the only city in the world that spans on two continents and frequently referred as “where civilizations meet”. The Bosphorus is the water channel separating the Asian and European parts of Istanbul.