

A destination of choice

By **TOLGA TUYLUOGLU**

DIRECTOR, UK & IRELAND TURKISH CULTURE AND TOURISM OFFICE



TOLGA TUYLUOGLU was appointed Director of Turkish Culture and Tourism Office in London in December 2010. His past roles at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism have ranged from Inspector to Head of the International Relations Department and Director of Revolving Funds. He also served as a member of the Executive Board of The Istanbul Convention & Exhibition Centre (ICEC – Lutfi Kirdar Covention Centre). Originally an Economist, he gained a Master of Business Administration from the University of Leicester.

The occasion of the State Visit of the President of the Republic of Turkey, His Excellency Adullah Gül and Mrs. Hayrünnisa Gül is a cause for great celebration. There is much to link Turkey and the UK, and this visit is sure to further cement the ties between our two countries.

The UK was one of the first countries with which the Ottoman Empire established regular diplomatic relations, as far back as 1583. The first Ottoman Ambassador to London was appointed in 1793 marking the beginning of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the two countries' relationship has gone from strength to strength, as represented by growing trade ties. At the same time, the UK has been one of the strongest supporters of Turkey joining the EU.

The last State Visit to the UK by a President of the Republic of Turkey was the visit of President Kenan Evren in 1988. Since then the Turkish tourism sector has grown rapidly: 2010 was another record-breaking year in which Turkey welcomed more than 28.6

million foreign tourists. The UK is now the third largest source of visitors to Turkey.

At the time of the last State Visit in 1988, Turkey hosted fewer than 200,000 British visitors each year. Last year it was over 2.6 million. More than one third of the UK population has now visited Turkey. Among them have been the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh who were hosted by President Gül in 2008.

As tourism has grown, so too has the understanding between the two countries. Of course, Turkey's beach holidays are a big draw and Turkey's extensive coastline, the longest in the Mediterranean, still remains a major attraction. The number of beaches and marinas in Turkey awarded the coveted Blue Flag now stands at 331, the country's highest ever number. Turkey ranks fourth out of the scheme's 41 participants worldwide, just behind France.

History is also a big attraction and in a recent survey a pleasing 71 per cent of British visitors to Turkey said that they had visited a museum or historic site during their stay. Museums in Turkey have seen a staggering 61 per cent rise in visitor numbers since 2008 and a programme of upgrading museum facilities has been undertaken by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in recent years. As a result, Turkey's museums now boast more user-friendly entry systems, as well as improved cafes and museum shops.

In 2011, the Selimiye Mosque in the former Ottoman capital of Edirne joined nine other UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Turkey.

In the year that London is set to host the 2012 Olympics, Istanbul has been designated European Capital of Sport. Event highlights include the IAAF World Indoor Athletics Championships, 9-11 March 2012, which is likely to be the final opportunity to see world-class athletes competing on an international level prior to the London 2012 Olympics. Istanbul is also bidding to host the 2020 Olympic games. Antalya too is set to enjoy a moment in the spotlight, with the World Amateur Team Golf championships taking place here in Autumn 2012.

I feel sure that these events and the state visit itself will serve to further strengthen the bonds between the UK and Turkey and herald an even closer relationship in the future.

To find out more about these and other developments in Turkey please visit www.goturkey.com.



Selimiye Mosque is a UNESCO World Heritage Site