

Istanbul



On an afternoon stroll through İstanbul you can marvel at the greatest examples of Byzantine art and architecture in the world, submerge yourself in the mystique of the seraglio or lose yourself in the labyrinthine Grand Bazaar – a bustling marketplace borne of ancient trade routes. The exquisite legacies of the Ottoman Empire, its mosques, *hamams* (bathhouses), palaces and fountains, are on almost every corner. You can join the throng at a *meyhane* (tavern) heaving with raki-fuelled song and dance, dine alongside Prada-clad locals enjoying fusion cuisine, wind down in a *çay bahçesi* (tea garden) alongside Anatolian gents puffing nargilehs and witness the ablutions of the faithful summoned by the melodious call to prayer.

Peer beneath the surface and you find a city of immense disparity, a sprawling, heaving metropolis battling the fuelling tensions between the ever-widening haves and have-nots and between those with eyes to the West and those with eyes to the East. A city splitting at the seams as it struggles to deal with a constant influx of migrants from Anatolia and beyond. The life lived by those with wealth alongside the Bosphorus, its romantic hubbub the daily rhythm of their life, couldn't be further from most İstanbuls, whose homes are in airless concrete suburbs far from the coast. For them İstanbul's jewels are forgotten for the working week, only to be reunited on Sunday when the family might picnic under trees at the Hippodrome. These energies and tensions make İstanbul all the more vital and beguiling.

The social challenges facing İstanbul, almost a microcosm of the world's tensions, are played out in one of the world's most historically rich and breathtakingly beautiful and vibrant cities. There simply is no other city like it.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvel at one of the world's great buildings, **Aya Sofya** (p104), and its stupendous dome
- Kick up your heels at İstanbul's ongoing eat-street party, **Nevizade Sokak** (p146)
- Admire the extraordinary Byzantine mosaics and frescoes at the **Kariye Müzesi** (p125)
- Take a boat trip along the mighty **Bosphorus** (p128)
- Join the crush and lose yourself in the **Grand Bazaar** (p115), an ancient shopping mecca
- Uncover the secrets of the seraglio at the opulent **Topkapı Palace** (p109)
- Wine, dine and shop along buzzing **İstiklal Caddesi** (p120), the heart of the modern city



If one had but a single glance to give the world, one should gaze on İstanbul

Alphonse de Lamartine

HISTORY Byzantium

The first historically significant settlement here was founded by a Megarian colonist named Byzas. Before leaving Greece, he asked

the Delphic oracle where to set his new colony and received the enigmatic answer: 'Opposite the blind'. When Byzas and his fellow colonists sailed up the Bosphorus in 657 BC, they noticed a small colony on the Asian shore at Chalcedon (modern-day Kadıköy). Looking left, they saw the superb natural harbour of the Golden Horn on the European shore. Thinking, 'Those people in Chalcedon must

ISTANBUL IN...

Two Days

Start the day by marvelling at the **Blue Mosque** (p106) and its venerable neighbour, **Aya Sofya** (p104). Next, investigate the watery depths of the **Basilica Cistern** (p108). By this stage you'll be in need of a rest, so make your way up Divan Yolu to the **Grand Bazaar** (p115) and have lunch at **Havuzlu Restaurant** (p142). Shopping is next on the agenda – if you can't find something fabulous to take home you're just not trying hard enough! Mission accomplished, wander north through the bustling mercantile area of Tahtakale to the **Spice Bazaar** (p118) by the water at Eminönü. After taste-testing your way through this historic market, wind up the day by sampling the national dish at **Hamdi Et Lokantası** (p142) – the kebaps here are as impressive as the panoramic views. After dinner return to the Blue Mosque, grab a seat at **Café Meşale** (p147) and sit back to finish the night by enjoying a nargileh (traditional water pipe), listening to live folk music and watching a dervish whirl.

Day two should be devoted to **Topkapı Palace** (p109) and the **İstanbul Archaeological Museum** (p114). Start at the palace and plan on spending at least four hours exploring. Enjoy lunch and the views from the terrace at **Konyalı restaurant** (p141) before making your way down the hill from the First Court to the museum to marvel at its collection. For dinner, you should make your way across the Galata Bridge to cosmopolitan Beyoğlu, promenade down **İstiklal Caddesi** (p120), and enjoy a parade of meze with the locals at party-central, **Nevizade Sokak** (p146).

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, then on your third day hop onto a ferry at Eminönü and explore the **Bosphorus** (p128). At night pamper yourself at a **hamam** (p133) – try Cağaloğlu or Çemberlitaş for maximum Otto-ambiance. Day four should see you heading towards the western districts of Old İstanbul to contemplate the extraordinarily beautiful Byzantine mosaics and frescoes at the **Kariye Müzesi** (p125). In the afternoon, make your way back to Sultanahmet and the impressive **Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts** (p108), with a stroll along the **Arasta Bazaar** (p106) to the **Great Palace Mosaics Museum** (p106). Wind down the day over a fish dinner with the city's power brokers at **Balıkçı Sabahattin** (p141) or mouth-watering *köfte* (meatballs) at **Tarihi Sultanahmet Köftecisi Selim Usta** (p142) and an after-dinner drink with panoramic views over the twinkling city lights at **Hotel Arcadia** (p138).

One Week

Follow the itineraries above for your first four days. By day five, you could head over to Beyoğlu, spending the morning in **İstanbul Modern** (p120) and/or **Dolmabahçe Palace** (p121). For lunch head to İstiklal Caddesi again and **Leb-i Derya** (p144) or **360** (p144) – both übermodern eateries with knockout views. After, shop til you drop. The delightful **Patisserie Markiz** (p145) offers sugar hits and coffee whenever you run out of stamina. Stay over this side for dinner. On day six the water beckons again and a ferry to the Princes' Islands (p162) is in order. Expect a big but relaxing day wandering around idyllic retreats working off a deliciously indulgent fish lunch. Your last day in the city could start at one of the city's most revered buildings, the magnificent **Süleymaniye Camii** (p116) and end in Asia, with a promenade in Kadıköy with İstanbul's West-focused youth.

be blind', they settled on the opposite shore, on the site of Lygos, and named their new city Byzantium.

Byzantium submitted willingly to Rome and fought its battles for centuries. But it finally got caught out supporting the wrong side in a civil war. The winner, Sepimus Severus, razed the city walls and took away its privileges in AD 196. When he relented and rebuilt the city, he named it Augusta Antonina.

Constantinople

Another struggle for control of the Roman Empire determined the city's fate for the next 1000 years. Emperor Constantine pursued his rival Licinius to Augusta Antonina, then across the Bosphorus to Chrysopolis (Üsküdar). Defeating his rival in 324, Constantine solidified his control and declared the city the 'New Rome'. He laid out a vast new city to serve as capital of his empire and inaugurated it with much pomp in 330.

Constantine died in 337, just seven years after the dedication of his new capital, but the city continued to grow under the rule of the emperors. Theodosius I ('the Great') had a forum built on the present site of Beyazıt Square, while his son Theodosius II, built the Theodosian walls in 413 when the city was threatened by the marauding armies of Attila the Hun. Flattened by an earthquake in 447 and hastily rebuilt within two months, the walls he built still surround the old city today.

Theodosius died in 450 and was succeeded by a string of six emperors, the last of whom was Justin, the uncle of the man who was to become one of the famous Byzantine emperors, Justinian (r 527–65). Three years before taking the throne, Justinian had married Theodora, a strong-willed former courtesan. Together they further embellished Constantinople with great buildings, including the famous Aya Sofya (537). Justinian's ambitious building projects and constant wars of reconquest exhausted his treasure and his empire. Following his reign, the Byzantine Empire would never again be as large, powerful or rich.

Much remains of ancient Constantinople, including churches, palaces, cisterns and the Hippodrome. In fact, there's more left than most people realise. Any excavation reveals ancient streets, mosaics, tunnels, water and

sewer systems, houses and public buildings buried beneath the modern city centre.

THE CONQUEST

The Ottoman sultan Mehmet II, known as Fatih (the Conqueror), came to power in 1451 and immediately departed his capital in Edirne, to conquer the once-great Byzantine city.

In four short months, Mehmet oversaw the building of Rumeli Hisarı, the great fortress on the European side of the Bosphorus, and the repair of Anadolu Hisarı, built half a century earlier by his great-grandfather Beyazıt I. Together these fortresses controlled the strait's narrowest point.

The Byzantines had closed the mouth of the Golden Horn with a heavy chain to prevent Ottoman boats from sailing in and attacking the city walls on the northern side. Not to be thwarted, Mehmet marshalled his boats at a cove (where the Dolmabahçe Palace now stands) and had them transported overland by night on rollers, up the valley (present site of the Hilton Hotel) and down the other side into the Golden Horn at Kasımpaşa. Catching the Byzantine defenders by surprise, he soon had the Golden Horn under control.

The last great obstacle was the city's mighty walls on the western side. No matter how heavily Mehmet's cannons battered them, the Byzantines rebuilt them by night and, come daybreak, the impetuous young sultan would find himself back where he'd started. Finally, he received a proposal from a Hungarian cannon founder called Urban who had come to help the Byzantine emperor defend Christendom against the infidels. Finding that the Byzantine emperor had no money, Urban instead offered to make Mehmet the most enormous cannon ever seen. Mehmet gladly accepted and the mighty cannon breached the walls, allowing the Ottomans into the city. On 28 May 1453 the final attack began and by the evening of the 29th the Turks were in complete control of the city. The last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI Dragases, died fighting on the walls.

Istanbul

THE OTTOMAN CENTURIES

Seeing himself as the successor to Constantine, Justinian and the other great emperors, Mehmet the Conqueror at once began to rebuild and repopulate the city. He chose the con-

spicuous promontory, Seraglio Point, to build his ostentatious palace, Topkapı, and repaired and fortified Theodosius' walls. Istanbul was soon the administrative, commercial and cultural heart of his growing empire.

The building boom Mehmet kicked off was continued by his successors with Süleyman the Magnificent, along with Islam's greatest architect, Sinan, responsible for more construction than any other sultan. The city was endowed with buildings commissioned by the sultan and his family, court and grand viziers including the Süleymaniye Camii (1550), the city's largest mosque. Later sultans also added mosques and in the 19th century numerous palaces were built along the Bosphorus, among them the Dolmabahçe.

As the Ottoman Empire grew to encompass the Middle East and North Africa as well as half of Eastern Europe, Istanbul became a fabulous melting pot of nationalities. On its streets people spoke Turkish, Greek, Armenian, Ladino, Russian, Arabic, Bulgarian, Romanian, Albanian, Italian, French, German, English and Maltese.

However, what was the most civilised city on earth in the time of Süleyman eventually declined along with the Ottoman Empire and by the 19th century Istanbul had lost much of its former glory. Nevertheless it continued to be the 'Paris of the East' and, to reaffirm this, the first great international luxury express train, the famous *Orient Express*, connected Istanbul with the French capital.

TURKISH REPUBLIC & RECENT EVENTS

Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk)'s post-WWI campaign for national salvation and independence was directed from Ankara. In founding the Turkish Republic, Atatürk decided to leave behind the imperial memories of Istanbul and set up his new government in Ankara, a city that could not be threatened by gunboats. Robbed of its status as the capital of a vast empire, Istanbul lost much of its wealth and glitter.

However, since the 1990s Istanbul has undergone a renaissance. Public transport has been upgraded, work on a cross-Bosphorus tunnel is underway and parklands now line the waterways. When Istanbul won the right to become the European Capital of Culture in 2010 other ambitious projects were excitedly placed on the drawing board. There are plans to remodel the Sirkeci waterfront and Saray

Burnu, with the latter returned to parklands and the coastal road moved underground.

Istanbul's cultural transformation is just as marked. The seedy dives of Beyoğlu have been replaced by funky cafés, bars and studios, transforming Beyoğlu into a Bohemian hub. Istanbul Modern has opened along the Bosphorus, showcasing Turkey's contemporary art to the world, and galleries seem to open weekly off Beyoğlu's bustling İstiklal Caddesi. The live-music scene in the city has exploded making Istanbul a buzzword for creative, energetic music with a unique East-West twist.

Turkey's bid to join the EU is underpinned by the fact that these days its beloved Istanbul is a cosmopolitan and sophisticated megalopolis, which has reclaimed its status as one of the world's truly great cities.

ORIENTATION

The Bosphorus strait, between the Black and Marmara Seas, divides Europe from Asia. On its western shore, European Istanbul is further divided by the Golden Horn (Haliç) into Old Istanbul in the south and Beyoğlu in the north.

Sultanahmet is the heart of Old Istanbul and it's here that you'll find most of the city's famous sites, including the Blue Mosque, Aya Sofya and Topkapı Palace. The adjoining area, with hotels to suit all budgets, is actually called Cankurtaran although if you say 'Sultanahmet' most people will understand where you mean.

Up the famous Divan Yolu boulevard from Sultanahmet you'll find the Grand Bazaar. To its north is the Süleymaniye Camii, which graces the top of one of the old city's seven hills. Down from the bazaar is the Golden Horn, home to the bustling transport hub of Eminönü.

Over the Galata Bridge from Eminönü is Beyoğlu, on the northern side of the Golden Horn. This is where you'll find the best restaurants, shopping and nightlife in the city, as well as Taksim Sq, the heart of 'modern' Istanbul.

Istanbul's glamour suburbs are Nişantaşı, and Teşvikiye, north of Taksim Sq, and its prime real estate is the suburbs lining the Bosphorus, especially those on the European side. However, many locals prefer to live on the Asian side, citing cheaper rents and a better standard of living. Üsküdar and Kadıköy

are the two Asian hubs, reachable by a short ferry ride from Eminönü or a drive over the Bosphorus Bridge.

İstanbul's otogar (bus station) is at Esenler, about 10km west of the city centre. The city's main airport, Atatürk International Airport, is in Yeşilköy, 23km west of Sultanahmet; a smaller airport, Sabiha Gökçen International Airport, is 50km southeast. The two main train stations are Haydarpaşa station near Kadıköy on the Asian side and Sirkeci station at Eminönü – though this will change once the Marmaray project comes online (p159). See p159 and p157 for details about getting to and from these transport hubs.

Maps

A free average-quality sheet map of İstanbul, in a number of different languages, is available from tourist-information offices, and it's as good as any sheet map on sale locally. For more detailed guidance, including all minor streets, look for *Sokak Sokak İstanbul (İstanbul Street by Street)*; €15). You can find it at **Azım Dağıtım** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-638 1313; Klodfarer Caddesi 6, Sultanahmet; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) or in **İstanbul Kitapçısı** (see below).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Bibliophiles will want to head towards the **Old Book Bazaar** (Map pp98-9; Sahaflar Çarşısı, Beyazıt), in a shady little courtyard west of the Grand Bazaar. It dates from Byzantine times. On the Beyoğlu side, you could spend years foraging through the treasure trove of second-hand books (some in English) on the two floors at **Aslıhan Pasajı** (Map pp100-1; Balık Pazarı, Galatasaray).

İstanbul's best range and value bookshops are along or just off İstiklal Caddesi in Beyoğlu. Bookshops worth checking out include:

Galeri Kayseri (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-512 0456; Divan Yolu 11 & 58, Sultanahmet; ☎ 9am-9pm) Has English-language fiction and glossy books on İstanbul; the other shop over the road – same owner – holds near identical stock.

Homer Kitabevi (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-249 5902; Yeni Çarşı Caddesi 28, Galatasaray, Beyoğlu; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-7.30pm Sun) Come here for Homer's unrivalled range of Turkish fiction, plus its enviable collection of nonfiction covering everything from Sufism and Islam to Kurdish and Armenian issues. There's children's books too.

İstanbul Kitapçısı (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-292 7692; İstiklal Caddesi 379, Beyoğlu; ☎ 10am-6.45pm Mon-Sat, noon-6.45pm Sun) This government-run bookshop has English-language books on İstanbul, a great selection of

maps and music, and the cheapest prints you'll find in the city (€0.55 to €3.50).

Linda's Book Exchange (Map pp100-1; Şehbender Sokak 18, Tünel, Beyoğlu; ☎ 5-7pm Mon-Fri) Note the limited opening hours of this cosy den of long-term expat, Linda. Unsigned, it's the first door in the building on the left.

Natural Book Exchange (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-517 0384; Akbiyik Caddesi 31, Sultanahmet; ☎ 8.30am-8pm) Passable range of second-hand titles with a few gems if you look hard. Swap or buy.

Robinson Crusoe (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 6968; İstiklal Caddesi 389, Beyoğlu; ☎ 9am-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-9.30pm Sun) Wide range of English-language novels and books about İstanbul – a very close second to Homer Kitabevi.

Emergency

Ambulance ☎ 112

Fire ☎ 110

Police ☎ 155

Tourist police (Map pp96-7; ☎ 527 4503; Yerebatan Caddesi 6, Sultanahmet) Located across the street from the Basilica Cistern.

Internet Access

There are internet cafés all over İstanbul; the following have ADSL connections, English-speaking staff and charge €2 per hour:

Anatolia Internet Cafe (Map pp96-7; İncili Çavuş Sokak 37/2, Sultanahmet; ☎ 9am-9pm) Friendly and mercifully nonsmoking, but not the fastest at times.

Otantik Internet Café (Map pp96-7; Alayköşkü Caddesi 2/B, Sultanahmet; ☎ 9am-midnight) Smoke-free with café attached and printing facilities.

Robin Hood Internet Café (Map pp100-1; Yeni Çarşı Caddesi 24/4, Galatasaray; ☎ 9am-11.30pm) Opposite the Galatasaray Lycée and on the 4th floor up a steep flight of stairs.

You can find wi-fi access at the international terminal at the Atatürk International Airport and at the **Sultan Pub** (Map pp96-7; Divan Yolu Caddesi 2, Sultanahmet; €3.50 per hr; ☎ 9.30am-1am). It's offered free at the café at **World House Hostel** (Map pp100-1; Galipdede Caddesi 117, Galata, Beyoğlu) if you have something to eat or drink there. See the website (www.winet.turktelekom.com.tr) for other locations throughout the city.

Laundry

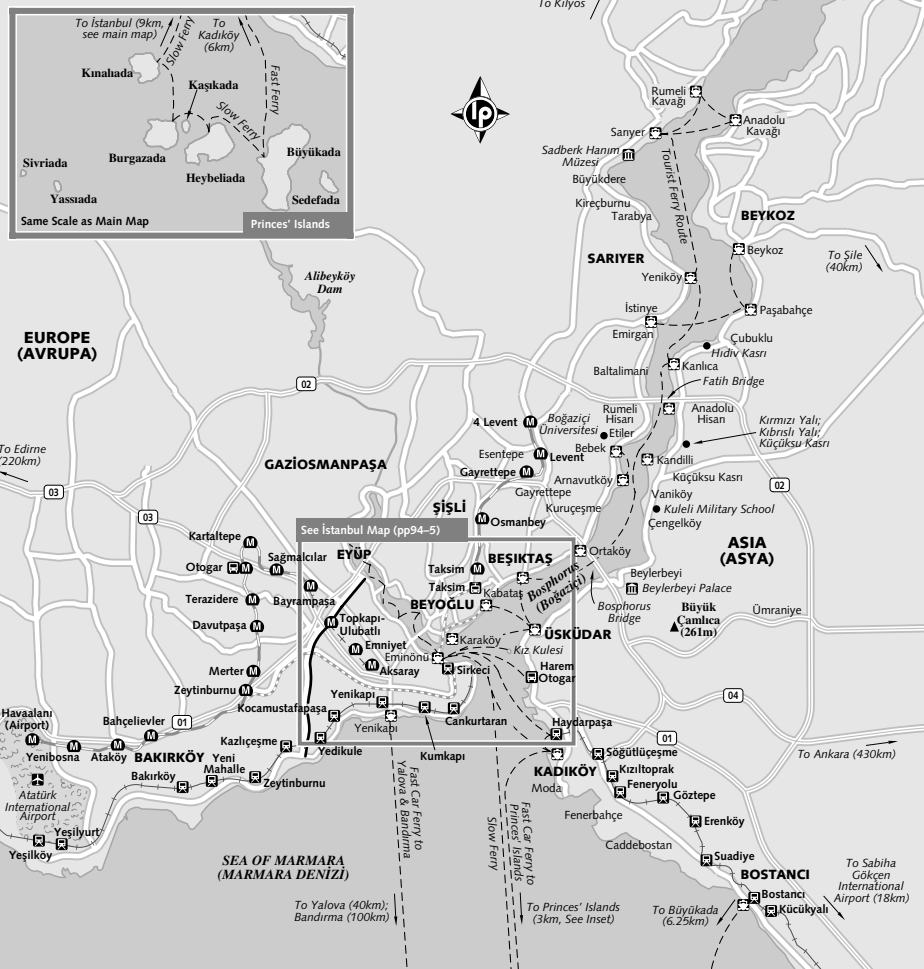
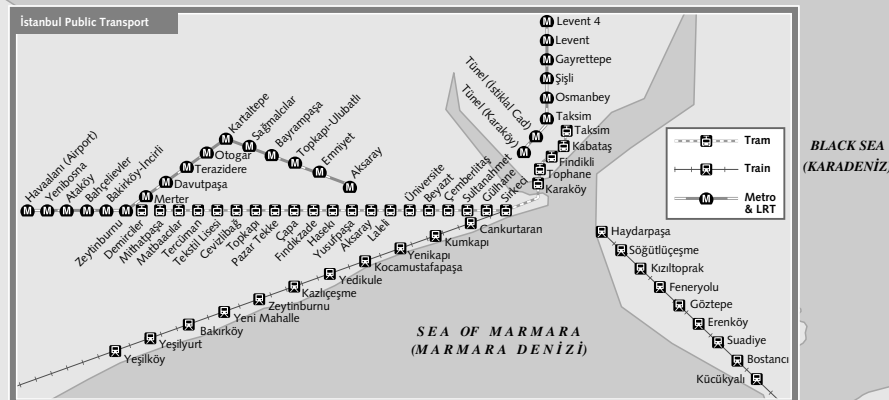
Clean laundry costs around €2.50 per kilo for washing; add €0.55 per kilo for drying. Good laundrettes are few and far between too.

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GREATER İSTANBUL & TRANSPORT MAP

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0 2 miles

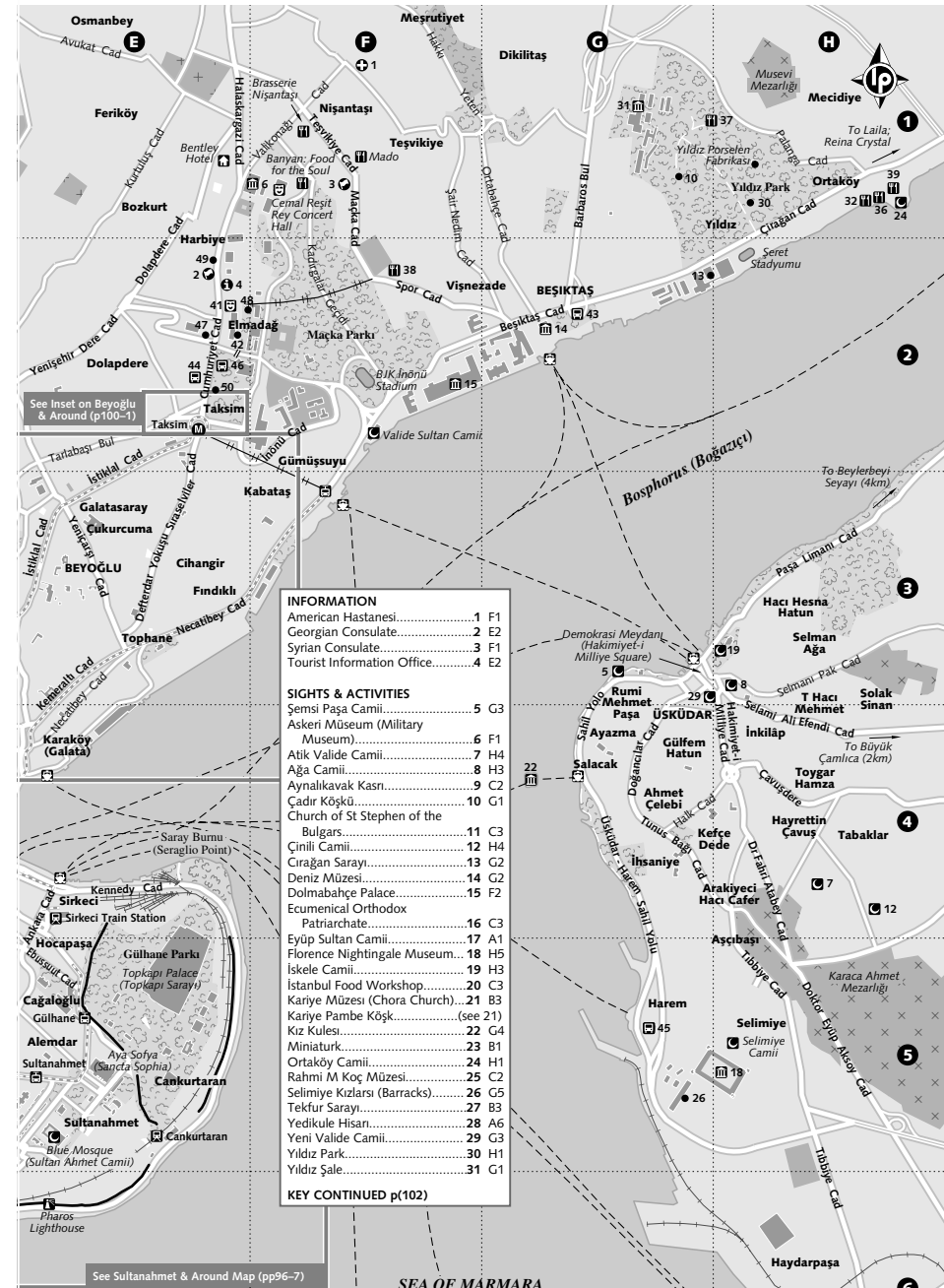
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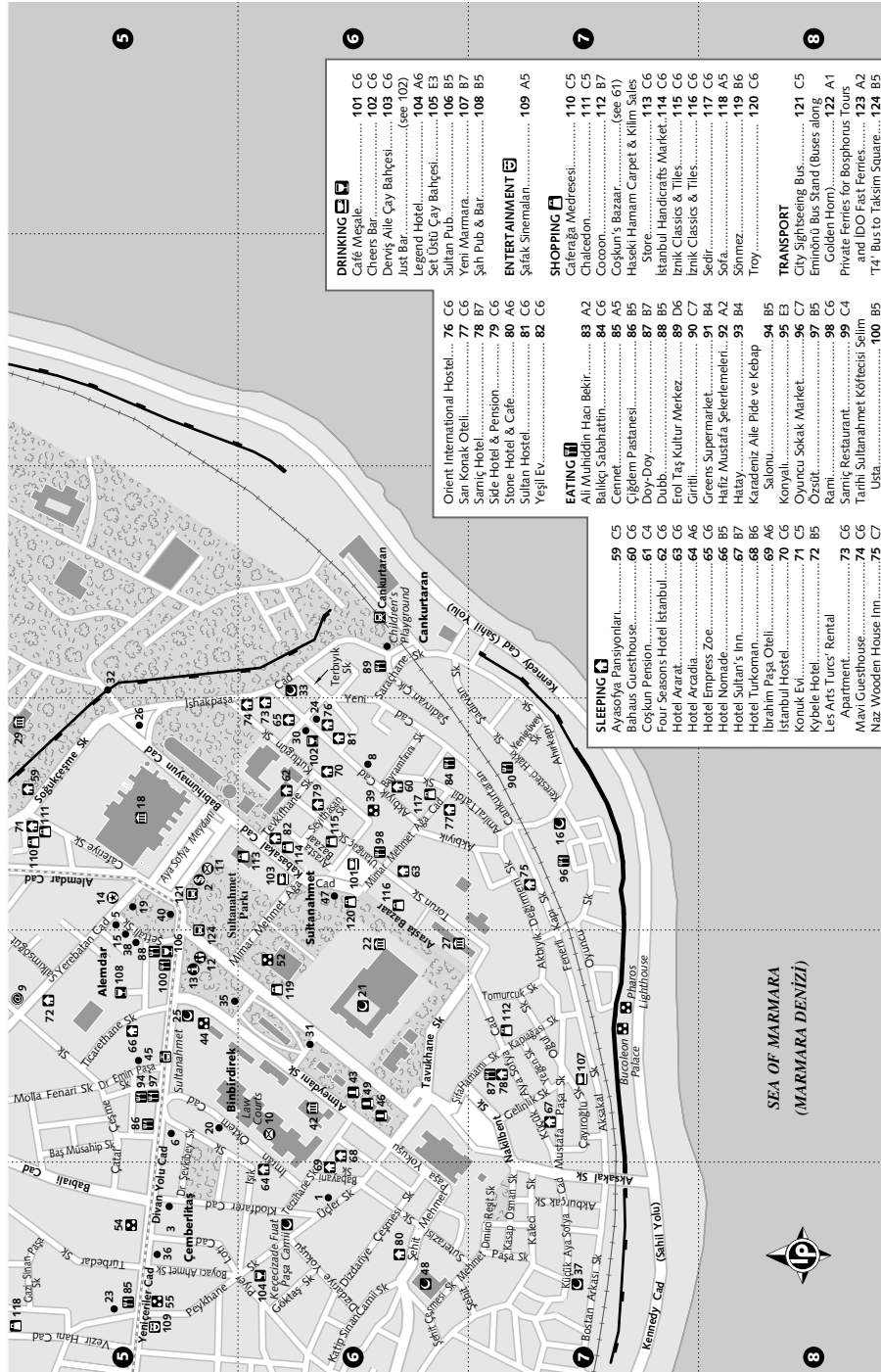
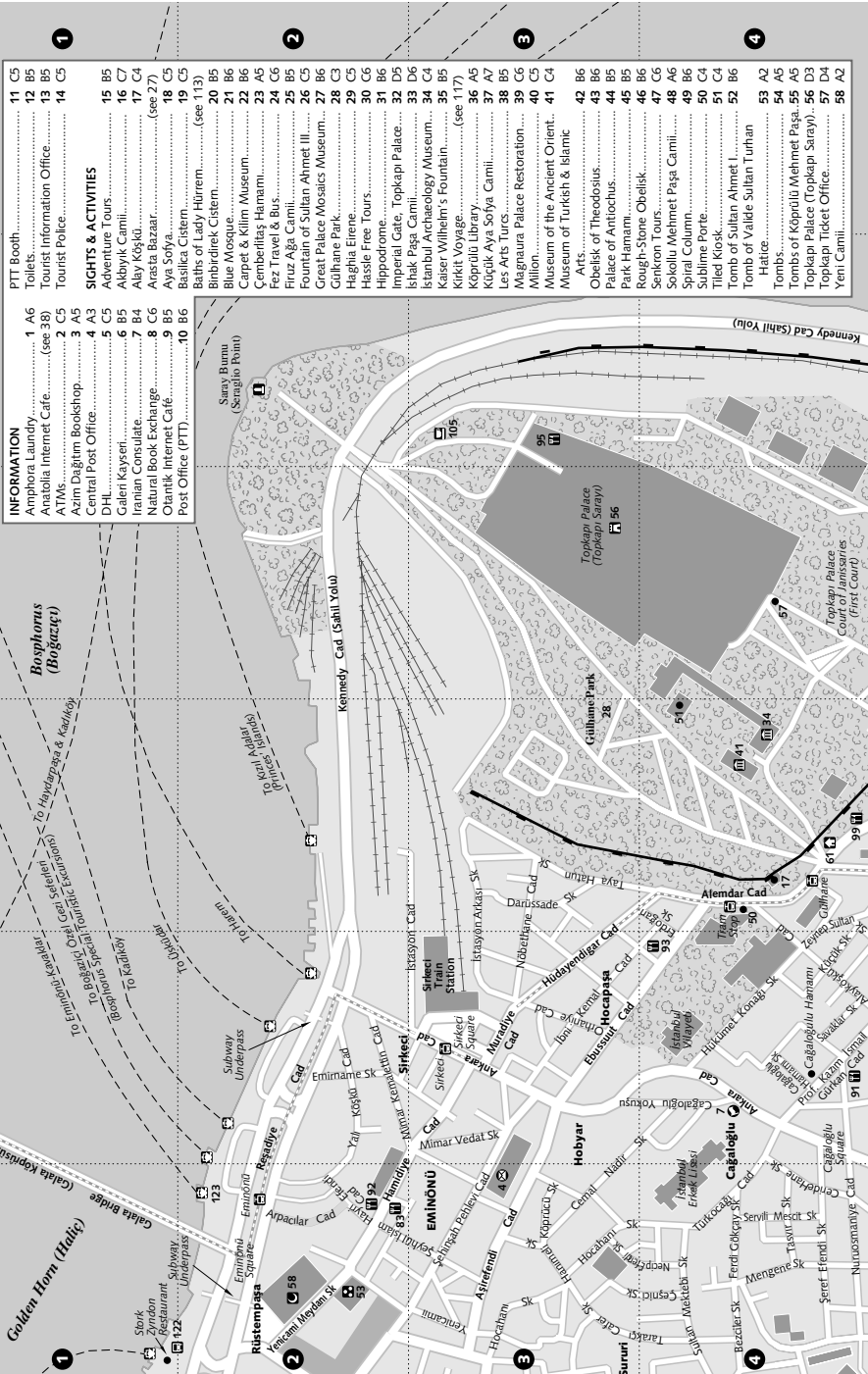
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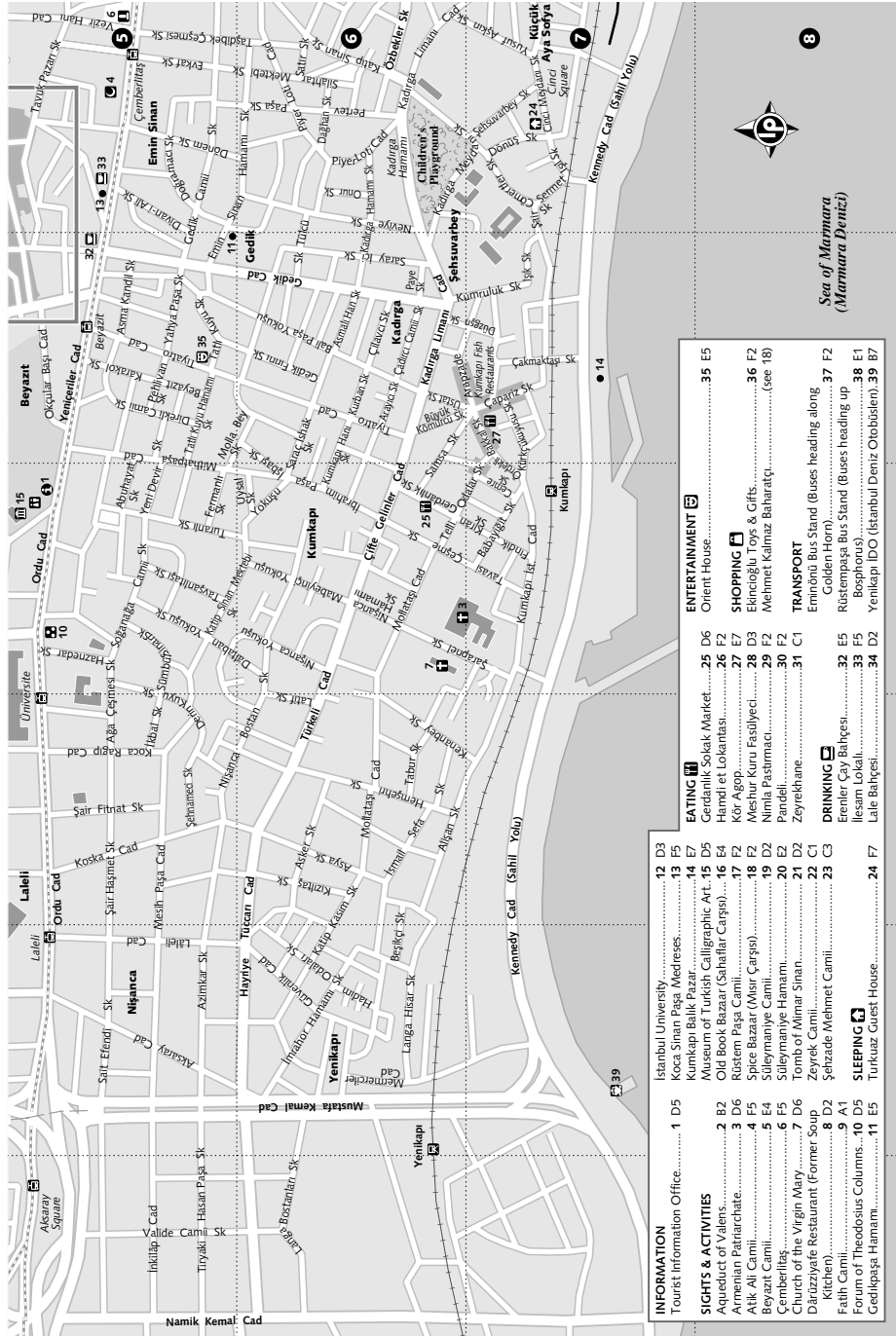
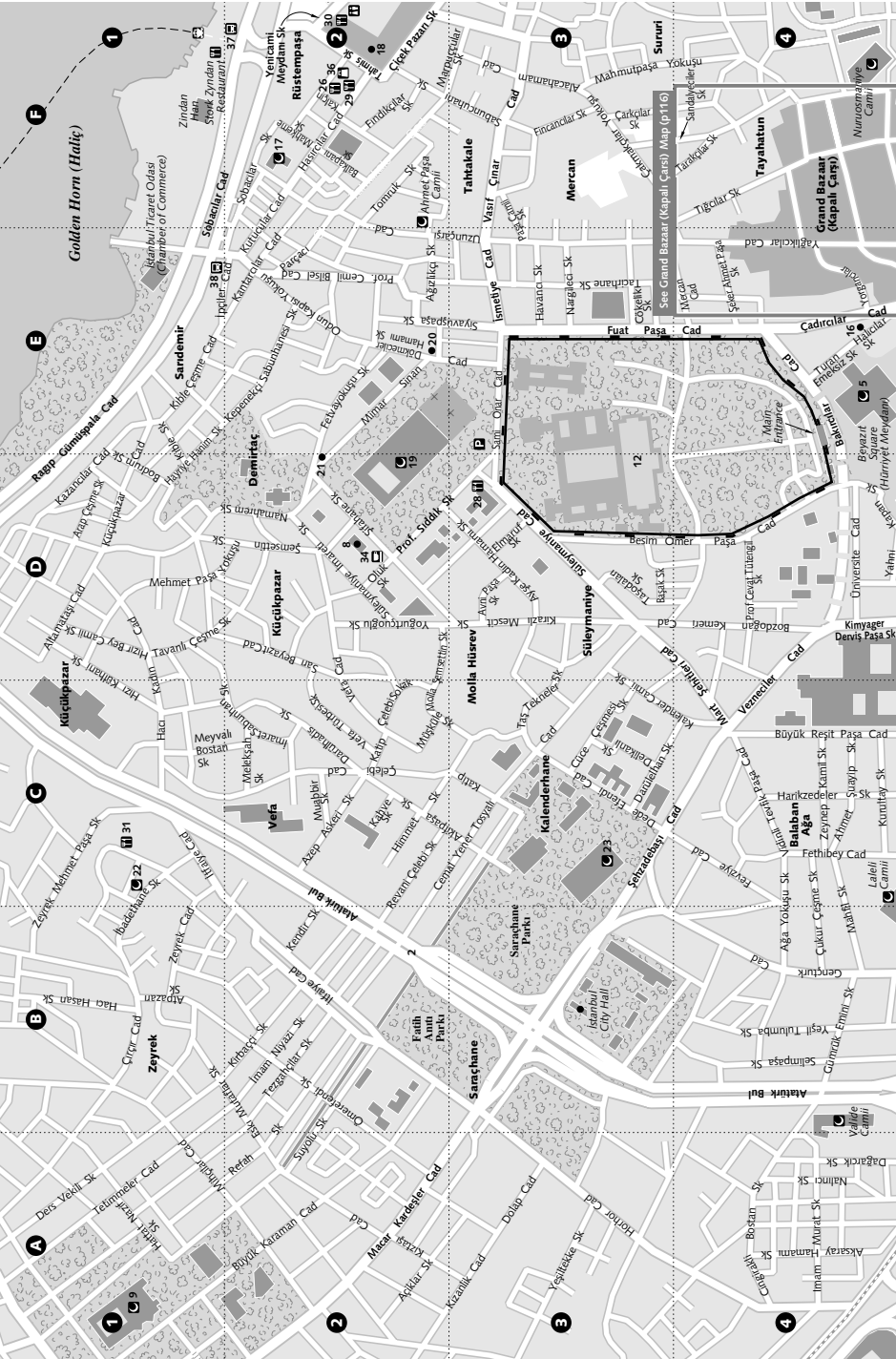
SEA OF MARMARA (MARMARA DENİZİ)

To Princes' Islands & Yavola

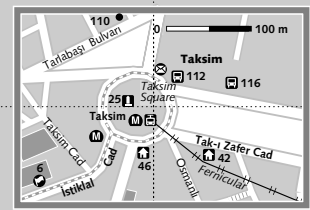
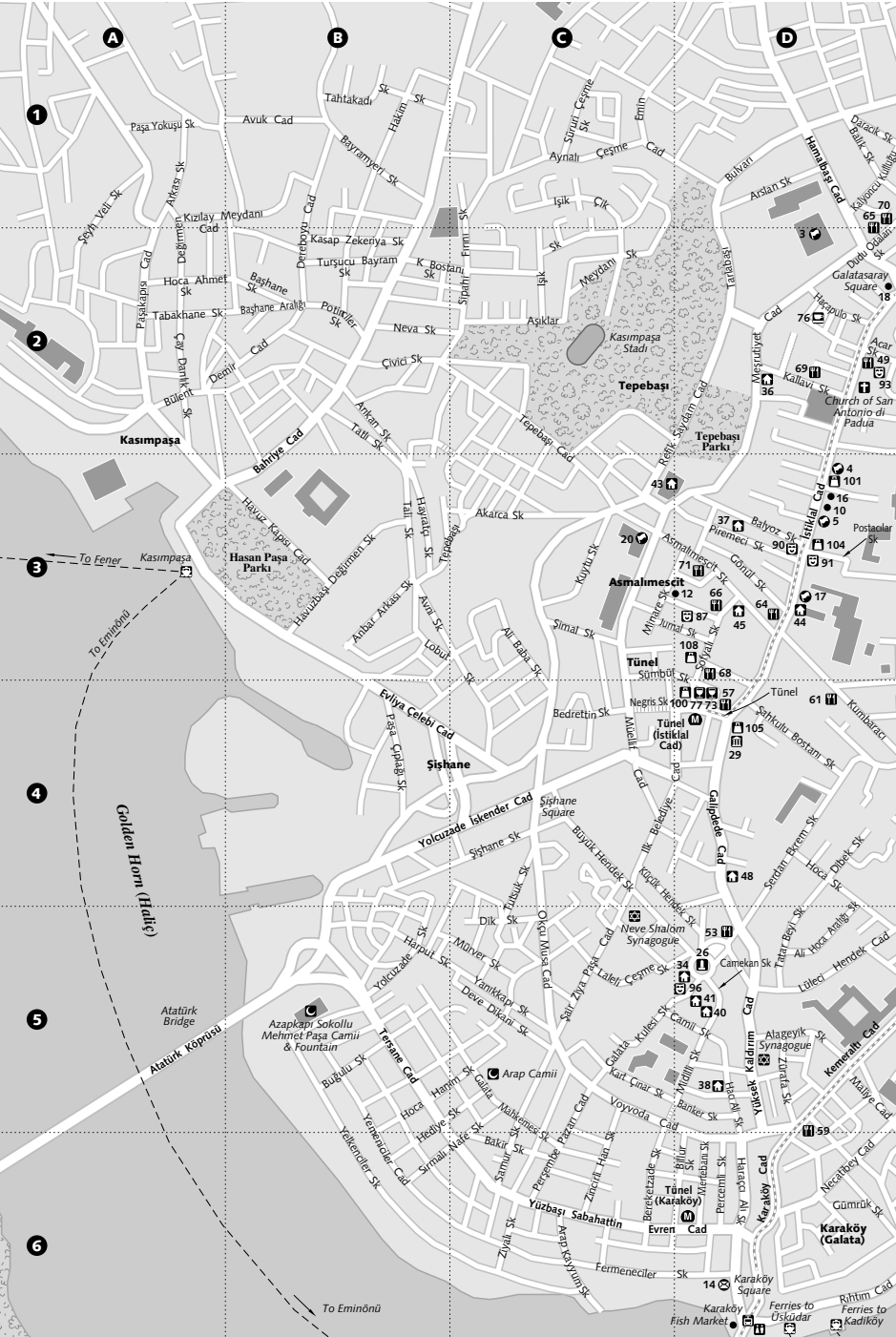


SEA OF MARMARA (MARMARA DENİZİ)





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EATING

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Amphora Laundry (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-638 1555; Pevkhane Sokak 53, Binbirdirek; ☹ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) Has super-friendly service and a squeaky-clean wash.

Media

The monthly English edition of *Time Out İstanbul* (€2.80) has a large listings section and is the best source for details about upcoming events – you can pick it up at newspaper booths in Sultanahmet.

The glossy *Cornucopia* magazine features many Istanbul-specific articles, including excellent restaurant and exhibition reviews. It is published three times per year (€11). It's impossible to find in Sultanahmet, but you can buy it in the bookshops along İstiklal Caddesi, Beyoğlu.

Medical Services

Although they are expensive, it's probably best to visit one of the private hospitals listed here if you need medical care when in İstanbul. The standard of care at these places is excellent and you will have little trouble finding staff who speak English. All accept credit-card payments and charge around €50 for a consultation.

Alman Hastanesi (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 2150; Sıraselviyer Caddesi 119, Taksim; ☹ 24hr emergency department) A few hundred metres south of Taksim Sq on the left-hand side, this hospital has eye and dental clinics and German administration.

American Hastanesi (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-311 2000; Güzelbahçe Sokak 20, Nişantaşı; ☹ 24hr emergency department) About 2km northeast of Taksim Sq, this hospital has US administration and a dental clinic.

Metropolitan Florence Nightingale Hastanesi (Map pp93; ☎ 0212-288 3400; Cemil Aslan Guder Sokak 8, Gayrettepe; ☹ 24hr emergency department) This modern facility has a well-respected paediatrics department.

Money

ATMs are everywhere in İstanbul and include those conveniently located in Aya Sofya Meydanı in Sultanahmet (Map pp96-7) and all along İstiklal Caddesi in Beyoğlu.

The 24-hour *döviz bürosu* (exchange bureau) in the arrivals hall at Atatürk International Airport offers rates comparable to those offered by city bureaux. Other exchange bureaux can be found on Divan Yolu in Sultanahmet, near the Grand Bazaar and around Sirkeci Station in Eminönü.

Post

Istanbul's central PTT (post office; Map pp96-7) is a couple of blocks southwest of Sirkeci Train Station. You can make phone calls, buy stamps and send and receive faxes 24 hours a day. All post-restante mail should be sent here (see p663).

There's a convenient PTT booth (Map pp96-7) outside Aya Sofya on Aya Sofya Meydanı in Sultanahmet and PTT branches in the basement of the law courts (Map pp96-7) on İmran Öktem Caddesi in Sultanahmet; off İstiklal Caddesi at Galatasaray Sq (Map pp100-1); near the Galata Bridge in Karaköy (Map pp100-1); and in the southwestern corner of the Grand Bazaar (Map p116).

You can send parcels at the central post office, or parcels less than 2kg at other PTT branches (but not the booth in Sultanahmet). PTTs offer an express post service as well or you could try a carrier such as DHL (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-512 5452; Yerebatan Caddesi 15, Sultanahmet; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat).

Telephone

If you are in European İstanbul and wish to call a number in Asian İstanbul, you must dial ☎ 0216 then the number. If you are in Asian İstanbul and wish to call a number in European İstanbul dial ☎ 0212 then the number. Don't use the area codes if you are calling a number on the same shore.

For international calls pick up an IPC phonecard from one of the booths along Divan Yolu in Sultanahmet, or İstiklal Caddesi in Beyoğlu.

Tourist Information

The **Ministry of Culture & Tourism** (www.tourismturkey.org, www.turizm.gov.tr) runs the following tourist information offices:

Atatürk International Airport (☹ 24hr) Booth in international arrivals area.

Beyazıt Sq (Hürriyet Meydanı; Map pp98-9; ☎ 0212-522 4902; ☹ 9am-5pm)

Elmadag (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-233 0592; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) In the arcade in front of the Istanbul Hilton Hotel, just off Cumhuriyet Caddesi about a 10-minute walk north of Taksim Sq.

Karaköy International Maritime Passenger Terminal (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-249 5776; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Sirkeci Train Station (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-511 5888; ☹ 9am-5pm)

Sultanahmet (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-518 8754; ☹ 9am-5pm) At the northeast end of the Hippodrome.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Istanbul is no more nor less safe a city than any large metropolis, but there some dangers worth highlighting. Some Istanbulis drive like rally drivers, and there is no such thing as right of way for pedestrians, despite encouragement from the little green man. As a pedestrian, give way to cars and trucks in all situations, even if you have to jump out of the way. The other main issue is a scam concerning men, bars and women. What could possibly go wrong you ask? See p655 for the low-down.

SIGHTS

Sultanahmet & Around

Many visitors to Istanbul never leave Sultanahmet, which is a shame, though understandable. This is 'Old Istanbul', a Unesco-designated World Heritage site packed with so many wonderful sights you could spend several weeks here and still only scratch the surface.

AYA SOFYA

Called Sancta Sophia in Latin, Hagia Sofia in Greek and the Church of the Divine Wisdom in English, **Aya Sofya** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-522 0989; Aya Sofya Meydani, Sultanahmet; adult/child under 7 €5.50/free, official guide (45 mins) €20; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-May, until 7.30pm Jun-Oct; upper gallery closes 4.30pm, or 6.45pm Jun-Oct) is Istanbul's most famous monument. Arrive early to avoid peak-season crowds.

Emperor Justinian (r 527-65) had the Aya Sofya built as part of his effort to restore the greatness of the Roman Empire. It was completed in 537 and reigned as the greatest church in Christendom until the Conquest in 1453. Mehmet the Conqueror had it converted into a mosque and so it remained until 1935, when Atatürk proclaimed it a museum. Ongoing restoration work (partly Unesco funded) means that the dome is always filled with scaffolding, but not even this can detract from the experience of visiting one of the world's truly great buildings.

On entering his great creation for the first time almost 1500 years ago, Justinian exclaimed, 'Glory to God that I have been judged worthy of such a work. Oh Solomon! I have outdone you!' Entering the building today, it is easy to excuse Justinian's self-congratulatory tone. The interior, with its magnificent domed ceiling soaring heavenward, is so sublimely beautiful that many

seeing it for the first time are quite literally stunned into silence.

As you walk into the **inner narthex**, look up to see a brilliant mosaic of Christ as Pantocrator (Ruler of All) above the third and largest door (the Imperial Door). Once through this door the magnificent main dome soars above you. This, the greatest of all domes, is supported by 40 massive ribs, constructed of special hollow bricks made in Rhodes from a unique light, porous clay, resting on huge pillars concealed in the interior walls. (Compare the Blue Mosque's four huge 'elephant's feet' pillars to appreciate the genius of Aya Sofya.)

The curious elevated kiosk screened from public view is the **Sultan's loge**. Ahmet III (r 1703-30) had it built so he could come in, pray and leave again unseen, thus preserving the imperial mystique. The ornate **library**, on the west wall, was built by Sultan Mahmut I in 1739.

In the side aisle to the northeast of the imperial door is the **weeping column**, with a worn copper facing pierced by a hole. Legend has it that the pillar is that of St Gregory the Miracle Worker and that putting one's finger in the hole can lead to ailments being healed if the finger emerges moist.

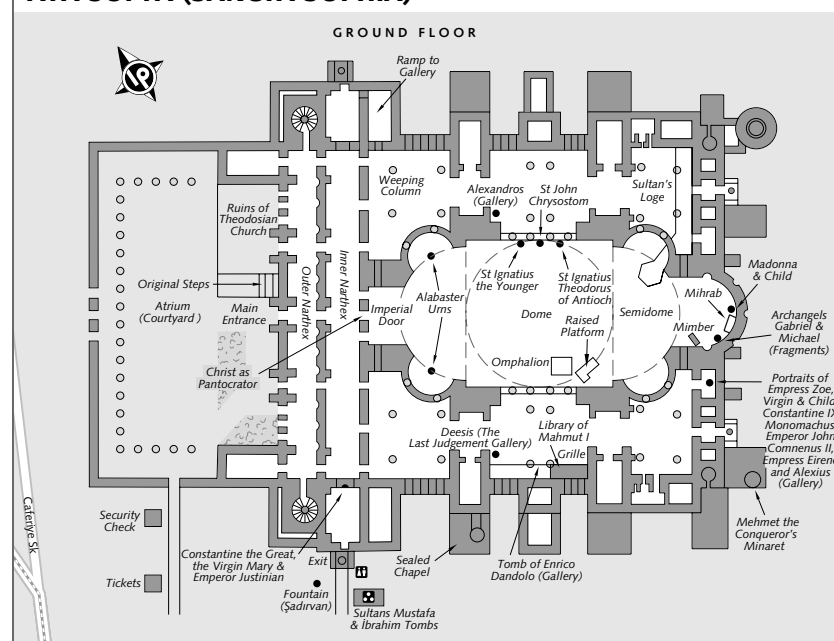
The large 19th-century **medallions** inscribed with gilt Arabic letters are the work of master calligrapher Mustafa İzzet Efendi, and give the names of God (Allah), Mohammed and the early caliphs Ali and Abu Bakr.

Mosaics

From the floor of Aya Sofya, 9th-century mosaic portraits of St Ignatius the Younger (c 800), St John Chrysostom (c 400) and St Ignatius Theodorus of Antioch are visible high up at the base of the northern tympanum (semicircle) beneath the dome. Next to these three, and seen only from the upstairs east gallery, is a portrait of Alexandros. In the apse is a wonderful mosaic of the Madonna and Child; nearby mosaics depict the archangels Gabriel and Michael, although only fragments of Michael remain.

The upstairs galleries house the most impressive of Aya Sofya's mosaics and mustn't be missed. They can be reached via a switch-back ramp at the northern end of the inner narthex. The magnificent *Deesis Mosaic (The Last Judgement)* in the south gallery dates from the early 14th century. Christ is at the

AYA SOFYA (SANCTA SOPHIA)



centre, with the Virgin Mary on the left and John the Baptist on the right.

At the apse end of the southern gallery is the famous mosaic portrait of the Empress Zoe (1028-50), who had three husbands and changed this mosaic portrait with each one. The portrait of the third Mr Zoe, Constantine IX Monomachus, survives because he outlived the empress.

To the right of Zoe and Constantine is another mosaic depicting characters with less saucy histories: in this scene Mary holds the Christ child, centre, with Emperor John (Johannes) Comnenus II (the Good) to the left and Empress Eirene (known for her charitable works) to the right. Their son Alexius, who died soon after this portrait was made, is depicted next to Eirene.

As you leave the museum from the narthex, make sure you turn and look up above the door to see one of the church's finest late 10th-century mosaics. This shows Constantine the Great, on the right, offering Mary, who holds the Christ child, the city of Constantinople; Emperor Justinian, on the left, is offering her Aya Sofya.

BATHS OF LADY HÜRREM

Traditionally, every mosque had a *hamam* included in or around its complex of buildings. Aya Sofya was no exception and this elegant symmetrical building known as the Haseki Hürrem Hamamı or **Baths of Lady Hürrem** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-638 0035; Aya Sofya Meydani 4, Sultanahmet; admission free; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun, until 6.30pm Jun-Oct), designed by Sinan in 1556-57, was built just across the road from the great mosque by Süleyman in the name of his wife Hürrem Sultan, known to history as Roxelana. The *hamam* was one of 32 designed by Sinan and is widely thought to be his best. It operated until 1910 and now houses a carpet shop run by the Ministry of Culture.

Designed as a 'double *hamam*' with identical baths for men and women, the centre wall dividing the two has now been breached by a small doorway. Both sides have separate entrances and the three traditional rooms: first the square *camekan* for disrobing (the men's side has a pretty marble fountain and stained-glass windows); then the long *soğukluk*, usually a passageway but also sometimes for washing; and finally the octagonal *hararet* for sweating,

massage and more washing. The most impressive features are the domes, with their star-like apertures. Also of note are the four semiprivate washing rooms in the *hararet*, as well as the central *göbektaş* (belly stone) in the men's bath, which is inlaid with coloured marble. In all, the place gives a good idea of how *hamams* are set up – perfect for those not convinced that they want to bare all in one of the city's still-functioning establishments.

BLUE MOSQUE

With his eponymously named mosque, Sultan Ahmet I (r 1603–17) set out to build a monument that would rival and even surpass the nearby Aya Sofya in grandeur and beauty. Today it's more widely known as the **Blue Mosque** (Sultan Ahmet Camii; Map pp96-7; Hippodrome, Sultanahmet; ☹️: closed during prayer times).

The mosque's architect, Mehmet Ağa, managed to orchestrate the sort of visual wham-bam effect with the mosque's exterior that Aya Sofya achieved with its interior. Its curves are voluptuous, it has six minarets and the courtyard is the biggest of all of the Ottoman mosques. The interior is conceived on a similarly grand scale: the blue tiles that give the building its unofficial name number in the tens of thousands, there are 260 windows and the central prayer space is huge.

To appreciate the mosque's design, approach it via the Hippodrome rather than straight from Sultanahmet Park through the crowds. Once inside the courtyard, which is the same size as the mosque's interior, you'll appreciate the building's perfect proportions.

The mosque is such a popular attraction that admission is controlled so as to preserve its sacred atmosphere. Only worshippers are admitted through the main door; tourists must use the south door.

Inside, the stained-glass windows and İznik tiles lining the walls immediately attract attention. Although the windows are replacements, they still create the luminous effects of the originals, which came from Venice. You will also see immediately why the Blue Mosque, constructed between 1606 and 1616, more than a millennium after Aya Sofya, is not as daring: four huge 'elephant's feet' pillars hold up the dome, a less elegant but sturdier solution to the problem of support.

From May to October there's a free sound and light show on the north side: check the board for times and languages.

The tile-encrusted **Tomb of Sultan Ahmet I** (Map pp96-7; donation expected; ☹️: 9.30am-4.30pm), the Blue Mosque's great patron, is in a separate building on the north side facing Sultanahmet Park. Ahmet, who had ascended to the imperial throne aged 14, died one year after the mosque was constructed, aged only 28. He rests here with a dozen or so children, more evidence that wealth and privilege didn't make the imperial family immune from tragedy.

Up a stone ramp on the Blue Mosque's northeastern side is the underwhelming **Carpet & Kilim Museum** (Halı ve Kilim Müzesi; Map pp96-7; ☎️: 0212-518 1330; Blue Mosque, Sultanahmet; admission €2; ☹️: 9am-noon & 1-4pm Tue-Sat), which is housed in the mosque's imperial pavilion.

GREAT PALACE MOSAICS MUSEUM

When archaeologists from the University of Ankara and Scotland's St Andrews University dug at the back of the Blue Mosque in the mid-1950s, they found a mosaic pavement dating from early Byzantine times (c AD 500). Covered with wonderful hunting and mythological scenes and emperors' portraits, the pavement was part of a triumphal way that led from the Byzantine emperor's Great Palace (which stood where the Blue Mosque now stands) down to the harbour of Bucoleon to the south. It is now displayed *in situ* in the **Great Palace Mosaics Museum** (Büyüksaray Mozaik Müzesi; Map pp96-7; ☎️: 0212-518 1205; Torun Sokak, Sultanahmet; admission €3; ☹️: 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Nov-May, to 6.30pm Jun-Oct), where there are informative panels documenting the floor's rescue and renovation.

Other 5th-century mosaics were saved when Sultan Ahmet I had an Arasta (row of shops) built on top of them. The **Arasta Bazaar** (Map pp96-7) now houses numerous carpet and ceramic shops that provide rental revenue for the upkeep of the Blue Mosque.

Enter the Great Palace Mosaics Museum from Torun Sokak behind the mosque and the Arasta.

HIPPODROME

The Hippodrome (Atmeydanı; Map pp96-7) was the centre of Byzantium's life for 1200 years and of Ottoman life for another 400-odd years. It was the scene of countless political dramas during the long life of the city. In Byzantine times, the rival chariot teams of 'Greens' and 'Blues' had separate political connections. Support for a team was akin to membership of a political party and a team

victory had important effects on policy. A Byzantine emperor might lose his throne as the result of a post-match riot.

Ottoman sultans also kept an eye on activities in the Hippodrome. If things were going badly in the empire, a surly crowd gathering here could signal the start of a disturbance, then a riot, then a revolution. In 1826 the slaughter of the corrupt janissary corps (the sultan's personal bodyguards) was carried out here by the reformer Sultan Mahmut II. And in 1909, there were riots here that caused the downfall of Abdül Hamit II and the rewriting of the Ottoman constitution.

Although the Hippodrome might be the scene of their downfall, Byzantine emperors and Ottoman sultans outdid one another in beautifying it, adorning it with statues from the far reaches of the empire. Unfortunately, only a handful of these statues remain. Chief among the thieves responsible were the soldiers of the Fourth Crusade, who sacked Constantinople, supposedly a Christian ally city, in 1204.

Near the northern end of the Hippodrome, the little gazebo in beautiful stonework is actually **Kaiser Wilhelm's Fountain**. The German emperor paid a state visit to Abdül Hamit II in

1901, and presented this fountain to the sultan and his people as a token of friendship.

The immaculately preserved pink granite **Obelisk of Theodosius**, the oldest monument in Istanbul, was carved in Egypt during the reign of Thutmose III (r 1549–1503 BC) and erected in the Amon-Re temple at Karnak. The Byzantine emperor, Theodosius, had it brought from Egypt to Constantinople in AD 390. The original obelisk was cut down for transit – the top segment was placed on the ceremonial marble base Theodosius had made. Look at the north side of the base to see a relief depiction of the engineering feat of transporting the obelisk here.

South of the obelisk is a strange column rising out of a hole in the ground. Known as the **Spiral Column**, it was once part of a golden basin supported by three entwined serpents cast to commemorate the victory of the Hellenic confederation over the Persians at Plataea. It stood in front of the temple of Apollo at Delphi from 478 BC until Constantine the Great had it brought to his new capital city around AD 330. Historians suspect the bronze serpents' heads were stolen during the Fourth Crusade.

ISTANBUL'S BOOMING POPULATION

As the main destination for migrants in the country, Istanbul's population has exploded over the last few decades. For those displaced by the war in the southeast and for those from impoverished rural areas looking for better work prospects, Istanbul, and many other big Turkish cities like it – Ankara, Adana, Izmir – offer work opportunities and the hope for a better life.

Turkey's position on the doorstep of the EU has made it one of the largest human trafficking centres in the world. Official estimates put the number of people illegally crossing Turkey's borders at around 100,000 annually – up from just 11,000 a decade ago – though some say the numbers could be as high as 250,000. Those who risk their lives hidden in ships or by crossing the long and rugged mountain border with Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbours, hope to eventually continue their journey by boat to Greece or Italy, or cross by land into Greece. Many get stuck in Istanbul and stay as long as it takes to get asylum visa applications accepted or to earn enough money to fund the next leg of their perilous journey. Most are forced to stay in filthy hotels in Aksaray or slum in overcrowded rooms in Kumkapı or Tarlabası (west of Taksim), work illegally (women are often forced into prostitution) and to seek whatever help they can get from religious institutions and the grossly over-patronised social services.

For a city already struggling to cope with the infrastructure and social-support demands of its growing number of migrants, the arrival of increasing numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and illegal migrants has not been met with much enthusiasm. Tensions have increased over the battle for the few jobs and services available.

Meanwhile, the EU continues to apply pressure on Turkey to stem the illegal immigrant tide. Recent clamp downs include the 110 foreigners found in a warehouse in an outer Istanbul suburb. Many worry, with Turkey's already shaky human-rights record, that these and other people with similar plights may be being deported or jailed indefinitely without their cases being heard properly.

Little is known about the 4th-century **Rough-Stone Obelisk**, except that in 869 an earthquake toppled the bronze pine cone from its top, and it was clad with sheets of gilded bronze by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (r 913–59), commemorated in the inscription in its base. Its bronze plates were ripped off during the Fourth Crusade, but you can still see the bolt holes where they would have been attached.

Note the original ground level of the Hippodrome at the base of the obelisks and column, some 2.5m below ground.

MUSEUM OF TURKISH & ISLAMIC ARTS

This impressive **museum** (Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi; Map pp96–7; ☎ 0212-518 1805; Hippodrome 46, Sultanahmet; admission €3; ☎ 9am–4.30pm Tue–Sun) is housed in the palace of İbrahim Paşa, built in 1520 on the western side of the Hippodrome.

İbrahim Paşa was Süleyman the Magnificent's close friend and brother-in-law. Captured by Turks as a child in Greece, he had been sold as a slave into the imperial household in İstanbul and worked as a page in Topkapı, where he became friendly with Süleyman, who was the same age. When his friend became sultan, İbrahim was in turn made chief falconer, chief of the royal bedchamber and grand vizier. This palace was bestowed on him by Süleyman the year before he was given the hand of Süleyman's sister, Hadice, in marriage. Alas, the fairy tale was not to last. İbrahim's wealth, power and influence on the monarch became so great that others wishing to influence the sultan became envious, chief among them Süleyman's wife, Roxelana. After a rival accused İbrahim of disloyalty, she convinced her husband that İbrahim was a threat and Süleyman had him strangled in 1536.

Inside, the most interesting exhibits are the floor-to-ceiling Uşak carpets, the beautifully illuminated Qurans and the relief map of the Ottoman Empire (in the room just before the carpets). Don't miss the fascinating ethnographic collection downstairs.

Labels are in Turkish and English. The coffeshop in the lovely green courtyard of the museum is a welcome refuge from the press of crowds and touts in the area.

BASILICA CISTERN

When those Byzantine emperors built something, they certainly did it properly! This extraordinary **cistern** (Yerebatan Sarayı; Map pp96–7;

☎ 0212-522 1259; Yerebatan Caddesi 13, Sultanahmet; admission €5.50; ☎ 9am–6.30pm Apr–Sep, til 5.30pm Oct–Mar), built by Justinian in AD 532, is a great place to while away half an hour, especially during summer when its cavernous depths stay wonderfully cool.

Like most sites in İstanbul, the cistern has a colourful history. Known in Byzantium as the Basilica Cistern because it laid underneath the Stoa Basilica, one of the great squares on the first hill, it was used to store water for the Great Palace and surrounding buildings. Eventually closed, it seems to have been forgotten by the city authorities some time before the Conquest. Enter scholar Petrus Gyllius, who was researching Byzantine antiquities in 1545 and was told by locals that they could obtain water miraculously by lowering buckets in their basement floors. Some were even catching fish this way. Intrigued, Gyllius explored the neighbourhood and discovered a house through whose basement he accessed the cistern. Even after his discovery, the Ottomans (who referred to the cistern as Yerebatan Sarayı) didn't treat the underground palace with the respect it deserved and it became a dumping ground for all sorts of junk, as well as corpses. It has been restored at least three times.

The cistern is 65m wide and 143m long, and its roof is supported by 336 columns arranged in 12 rows. It once held 80,000 cubic metres of water, pumped and delivered through nearly 20km of aqueducts.

Constructed using columns, capitals and plinths from ruined buildings, the cistern's symmetry and sheer grandeur of conception is quite extraordinary. Don't miss the two columns in the northwestern corner supported by upside-down Medusa heads or the column towards the centre featuring a teardrop design.

Walking on the raised wooden platforms, you'll feel water dripping from the vaulted ceiling and may catch a glimpse of ghostly carp patrolling the water. Lighting is atmospheric and the small café near the exit is certainly an unusual spot to enjoy a cup of çay (tea).

BİNBİRDİREK CISTERN

Binbirdirek (Binbirdirek Sarayı, Cistern of 1001 Columns; Map pp96–7; ☎ 0212-518 1001; İmran Öktem Caddesi 4, Binbirdirek; admission incl one drink €5.50; ☎ 9am–6pm) was built by Constantine in AD 330, and is mainly noteworthy for its custom-built col-

umns, which feature round discs designed to absorb seismic shocks. They've been remarkably successful given only 12 of the original 224 columns have been replaced. During the Ottoman era it was used as a *han* (inn) for silk manufacturers as it could be safely locked up at night, but the false floor that was put in at the time definitely detracts from the space. At the time of writing work was underway to open it as a Byzantine museum, displaying computer-animated re-creations of the city's Byzantine monuments, including the Hippodrome.

KÜÇÜK AYA SOFYA CAMİİ

Justinian and Theodora built this **church** (Little Aya Sofya, SS Sergius & Bacchus Church; Map pp96–7; Küçük Aya Sofya Caddesi; donation requested) sometime between 527 and 536 (just before Justinian built Aya Sofya). It was named after the two patron saints of Christians in the Roman army. Its dome is architecturally noteworthy and its plan – that of an irregular octagon – unusual. Like Aya Sofya, its interior was originally decorated with gold mosaics and featured columns made from fine green and red marble. The mosaics are long gone, but the impressive columns remain. The church was converted into a mosque by the chief white eunuch Hüseyin Ağa around 1500; his tomb is to the north of the building.

LEAVE YOUR GUIDEBOOK AT THE HOTEL

Scrape away the tourist-friendly veneer of Sultanahmet and the glamorous Bosphorus-side suburbs to see another side of İstanbul. Leave your guidebook behind and explore parts of the city left off most tourists' itineraries. Your adventures will be amply rewarded.

Well worth exploring is the **Kadırga/Kumkapı area** (Map pp98–9). This historic Old İstanbul quarter is begging to be added to İstanbul's World Heritage listing before it crumbles away – and it's only a five-minute walk from Sultanahmet. Explore the streets south of Kadırga Limanı Caddesi to see the hubbub of daily life in teetering Ottoman houses with fluttering washing spanning narrow, cobbled lanes; children kicking balls; fruit sellers pushing carts calling out their wares; *simit* (O-shaped bread rings) sellers balancing towers of fresh *simit*s on trays on their heads. The Kumkapı Balık Pazar (fish market) by the shore is one of İstanbul's busiest and best. Most fish winds up at the *meyhane* district, close by, which is fabulous on Friday and Saturday nights (and deathly quiet at other times). You can't go wrong eating at long-timer, **Kör Agop** (Map pp98–9; Ürdekli Bakkal Sokak 32). You may want to avoid wandering the side streets after dark, as Kumkapı's *meyhane* district can be pretty seedy – catch a taxi back to your hotel.

If you can, time your visit for the Thursday street market when the locals spill out of their dens. This is one of İstanbul's main migrant suburbs, and at the market you'll see all kinds, from African refugees (see p107) selling rip-off watches, leech sellers peddling their slippery wares, grizzled Anatolian gents in baggy pants, to Russians selling vodka. This area is also home to a large proportion of İstanbul's Armenian population. Pay a visit to the **Armenian Patriarchate** (Map pp98–9; Şarapnel Sokak 2) and the Church of the Virgin Mary, opposite.

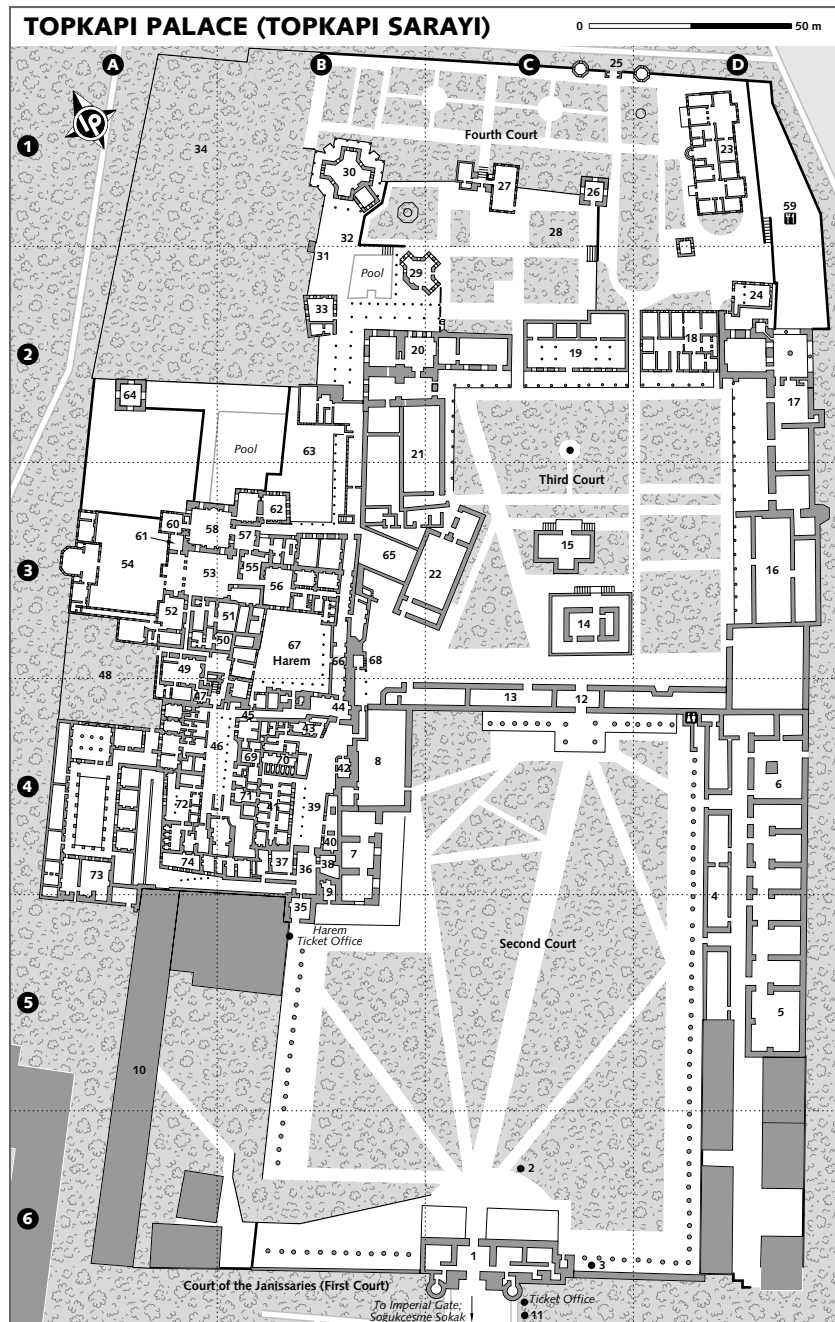
At the time of research extensive renovations were near completion. The mosque should be open to visitors by the time you read this.

After visiting Küçük Aya Sofya, go north along Şehit Mehmet Paşa Sokak and back up the hill to see the stunning little **Sokollu Mehmet Paşa Camii**, designed by Sinan in 1571.

TOPKAPI PALACE

Home to Selim the Sot, who drowned in the bath after drinking too much champagne; İbrahim the Mad, who lost his reason after being locked up for four years in the infamous palace *kafes* (cage); and Roxelana, beautiful and malevolent consort of Süleyman the Magnificent, the famous **Topkapı Palace** (Topkapı Sarayı; Map p110 unless otherwise stated; ☎ 0212-512 0480; Soğukçeşme Sokak, Sultanahmet; adult/child under 7 €5.50/free; harem admission adult/child under 7 €5.50/free; ☎ 9am–7pm Wed–Mon Apr–Oct, closes 5pm Nov–May) would have to be the subject of more colourful stories than most of the world's museums put together. No wonder it's been the subject of an award-winning feature film (Jules Dassin's *Topkapı*), an opera (Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*) and a blockbuster social history (John Freely's wonderful *Inside the Seraglio*).

Mehmet the Conqueror started work on the palace shortly after the Conquest in 1453 and



lived here until his death in 1481. Subsequent sultans lived in this rarefied environment until the 19th century, when they moved to ostentatious European-style palaces such as Dolmabahçe, Çırağan and Yıldız that they built on the shores of the Bosphorus. Mahmut II (r 1808–39) was the last sultan to live in Topkapı.

Seeing Topkapı requires at least half a day but preferably more. If you are short on time see the harem, treasury and the rooms around the palace and the treasury at the main ticket office just outside the gate to the second court. Tickets to the harem are available at the ticket box outside the harem itself. Guides to the palace congregate next to the main ticket office. A one-hour tour will cost you €10 per person (minimum three people or €30). Alternatively, an audio-guide costs €5. These and maps of the palace are available at the booth just inside the turnstile entrance to the second court.

Before you enter the Imperial Gate (Bab-ı Hümayun) of Topkapı, take a look at the ornate structure in the cobbled square near

the gate. This is the **Fountain of Sultan Ahmet III** (Map pp96–7), built in 1728 by the sultan who so loved tulips that his reign was dubbed the Tulip Age.

First Court

Topkapı grew and changed with the centuries, but the palace's basic four-courtyard plan remained the same. The Ottomans followed the Byzantine practice of secluding the monarch from the people: the first court was open to all; the second only to people on imperial business; the third only to the imperial family, VIPs and palace staff; while the fourth was the 'family quarters'.

As you pass through the great Imperial Gate behind the Aya Sofya, you enter the First Court, the Court of the Janissaries. On your left is the Byzantine **Haghia Eirene** (Aya İrini Kilisesi, Church of the Divine Peace; Map pp96–7), built in the 4th century, and rebuilt next century by Justinian, so the church you see is as old as Aya Sofya. It's usually only open for concerts during the Istanbul International Music Festival. Also on the left is the gate to the Imperial Mint (Darphane-I

SECOND COURT

Middle Gate.....	1	C6
Audio Tour Booth.....	2	C6
Imperial Carriages.....	3	C6
Palace Kitchens.....	4	D5
Chinese & Japanese Porcelain.....	5	D5
Helvahane (Temporary Exhibitions).....	6	D4
Imperial Council Chamber.....	7	B4
Inner Treasury.....	8	B4
Kiosk.....	9	B4
Imperial Stables.....	10	A5

THIRD COURT

Book & Gift Shop.....	11	C6
Gate of Felicity.....	12	C4
White Eunuchs' Quarters.....	13	C4
Audience Chamber.....	14	C3
Library of Ahmet III.....	15	C3
Dormitory of the Expeditionary Force (Costumes).....	16	D3
Imperial Treasury.....	17	D2
Museum Directorate.....	18	D2
Treasury Dormitory.....	19	C2
Sacred Safekeeping Rooms.....	20	B2
Quarters of Pages in Charge of the Sacred Safekeeping Rooms (Paintings & Calligraphy).....	21	B2
Mosque of the Eunuchs & Library.....	22	C3

FOURTH COURT

Mecidiye Köşkü.....	23	D1
Konyalı Restaurant.....	(see 23)	
Sofa or Terrace Mosque.....	24	D2
Gate of the Privy Gardens.....	25	C1
Chief Physician's Room.....	26	C1
Kiosk of Mustafa Pasha.....	27	C1
Tulip Garden.....	28	C1
Revan Kiosk.....	29	B2
Baghdad Kiosk.....	30	B1
İftariye Baldachin.....	31	B2
Marble Terrace & Pool.....	32	B1
Circumcision Room.....	33	B2
Lower Gardens of the Imperial Terrace.....	34	A1

HAREM

Carriage Gate.....	35	B5
Dome with Cupboards.....	(see 35)	
Hall with Şadırvan.....	36	B4
Black Eunuchs' Mosque.....	37	B4
Tower of Justice.....	38	B4
Courtyard of the Black Eunuchs.....	39	B4
Harem Eunuchs' Mosque.....	40	B4
Black Eunuchs' Dormitories.....	41	B4
Harem Chamberlain's Room.....	42	B4
Chief Black Eunuch's Room.....	43	B4
Main Gate.....	44	B4
Second Guard Room.....	(see 44)	
Concubines' Corridor.....	45	B4

Concubines' & Consorts' Courtyard.....	46	A4
Sultan Ahmet's Kiosk.....	47	A4
Harem Garden.....	48	A3
Valide Sultan's Quarters.....	49	A3
Sultan's Hamam.....	50	B3
Valide Sultan's Hamam.....	51	B3
Chamber of Abdül Hamit I.....	52	A3
Imperial Hall.....	53	A3
Terrace of Osman III.....	54	A3
Room with Hearth.....	55	B3
Room with Fountain.....	(see 55)	
Consultation Place of the Genies.....	56	B3
Beautifully Tiled Antechamber.....	57	B3
Privy Chamber of Murat III.....	58	A3
Konyalı Restaurant.....	59	D1
Library of Ahmet I.....	60	A3
Dining Room of Ahmet III.....	61	A3
Double Kiosk.....	62	B3
Favourites' Courtyard & Apartments.....	63	B2
Private Prison.....	64	A2
Harem Mosque.....	65	B3
Golden Road.....	66	B3
Courtyard of the Valide Sultan.....	67	B3
Birdcage Gate.....	68	B3
Harem Kitchen.....	69	B4
Imperial Princes' School.....	70	B4
Women's Hamam.....	71	B4
Women's Dormitory.....	72	A4
Harem Hospital.....	73	A4
Laundry Room.....	74	A4

Amire) where there are often temporary exhibitions.

Second Court

The **Middle Gate** (Ortakapı or Bab-üs Selâm) led to the palace's Second Court, which was used for the business of running the empire. Only the sultan and the *valide sultan* (mother of the reigning sultan) were allowed through the Middle Gate on horseback. Everyone else, including the grand vizier, had to dismount. The gate was constructed by Süleyman the Magnificent in 1524.

To the right after you enter are models and a map of the palace. Beyond them, in a nearby building, you'll find a collection of imperial carriages.

The second court has a beautiful, park-like setting. Topkapı is not based on a typical European palace plan – one large building with outlying gardens – but is a series of pavilions, kitchens, barracks, audience chambers, kiosks and sleeping quarters built around a central enclosure.

The great **Palace Kitchens**, on your right, hold a small portion of Topkapı's vast collection of Chinese celadon porcelain. In a building close by are the collections of silverware and glassware. The last of the kitchens, the Helvahane, in which the palace sweets were made, now hosts occasional temporary exhibitions.

On the left (west) side of the second court is the ornate **Imperial Council Chamber**, also called the Divan Salonu. The Imperial Divan (council) met in the Imperial Council Chamber to discuss matters of state while the sultan eavesdropped through a grille high on the wall at the base of the **Tower of Justice** (Adalet Kulesi) in the harem. North of the Imperial Council Chamber is the **Inner Treasury**, which today exhibits arms and armour, including a massive sword that belonged to Mehmet the Conqueror.

The entrance to the palace's most famous sight, the **harem**, is beneath the Tower of Justice.

The Harem

If you decide to tour the harem – and we highly recommend you do – you have no option but to take a guided tour; tickets are available from the ticket office outside the harem's entrance. There are usually lengthy queues and numbers are limited to 60 for each 30-minute tour, so it's a good idea to head this

way as soon as you enter Topkapı or try to arrive in time for the 9.30am tour. Tours depart every 30 minutes from 9.30am to 5pm (4pm in winter) and are in English and Turkish.

Multilingual audio-guides (€4) to the harem are available at the ticket booth outside, though these aren't much use as you're whipping through the tour with barely enough time to listen to the tour guide let alone the audio-guide. A better option may be the combined harem and treasury audio-guides for €5.

As popular belief would have it, the harem was a place where the sultan could engage in debauchery at will (and Murat III did, after all, have 112 children!). In reality, these were the imperial family quarters, and every detail of harem life was governed by tradition, obligation and ceremony. The word 'harem' literally means 'private'.

The women of Topkapı's harem had to be foreigners as Islam forbade enslaving Muslims, Christians or Jews. Girls, too, were bought as slaves (often having been sold by their parents at a good price) or were received as gifts from nobles and potentates.

On entering the harem, the girls would be schooled in Islam and Turkish culture and language, as well as the arts of make-up, dress, comportment, music, reading and writing, embroidery and dancing. They then entered a meritocracy, first as ladies-in-waiting to the sultan's concubines and children, then to the sultan's mother and finally, if they were the best, to the sultan himself.

Ruling the harem was the *valide sultan* (mother of the sultan). She often owned large landed estates in her own name and controlled them through black eunuch servants. Able to give orders directly to the grand vizier, her influence on the sultan, on the selection of his wives and concubines and on matters of state was often profound.

The sultan was allowed by Islamic law to have four legitimate wives, who received the title of *kadın* (wife). He could have as many concubines as he could support – some had up to 300, although they were not all in the harem at the same time. If a sultan's wife bore him a son she was called *haseki sultan*; *haseki kadın* if it was a daughter. The Ottoman dynasty did not observe primogeniture (the right of the first-born son to the throne), so in principle the throne was available to any imperial son. Each lady of the harem struggled to have her son proclaimed heir to the throne,

which would assure her own role as the new *valide sultan*.

Although the harem is built into a hillside and has six levels, the standard tour takes you through or past only a few dozen of the most splendid rooms on one level. Interpretive panels in Turkish and English have been placed throughout the building, although you are hurried through at such a pace that there is little time to read them.

Highlights of the tour include the narrow **Black Eunuchs' Courtyard** (39), the marble and gold **Sultan's Hamam** (50), the **Concubines' & Consorts' Courtyard** (46), the **Valide Sultan's Quarters and Courtyard** (49), the ornate **Privy Chamber of Murat III** (58), the **Library of Ahmet I** (60), the **Dining Room of Ahmet III** (61) and the **Double Kiosks** (62).

Third Court

If you enter the Third Court after visiting the harem you should head for the main gate into the court and enter again to truly appreciate the grandeur of the approach to the heart of the palace. This main gate, known as the **Gate of Felicity** or Gate of the White Eunuchs, was the entrance into the sultan's private domain.

Just inside the Gate of Felicity is the **Audience Chamber**, constructed in the 16th century but refurbished in the 18th century. Important officials and foreign ambassadors were brought to this kiosk to conduct the high business of state. Seated on divans whose cushions were embroidered with over 15,000 seed pearls, the sultan inspected the ambassador's gifts and offerings as they were passed through the small doorway on the left.

Right behind the Audience Chamber is the pretty **Library of Ahmet III**, built in 1719.

To the right of the Audience Chamber (ie on the opposite side of the harem exit) are the rooms of the **Dormitory of the Expeditionary Force**, which now house rich collections of imperial robes, kaftans and uniforms worked in silver and gold thread. Next to the Dormitory of the Expeditionary Force is the **Treasury**. See right for details of its collection.

Opposite the Treasury on the other side of the Third Court is another set of wonders: the holy relics in the Suite of the Felicitous Cloak, nowadays called the **Sacred Safekeeping Rooms**. These rooms, sumptuously decorated with İznik tiles, constitute a holy of holies within the palace. Only the chosen few could

enter the Third Court, but entry into the Suite of the Felicitous Cloak was for the chosen of the chosen, and then only on ceremonial occasions.

In the entry room, notice the carved door from the Kaaba in Mecca and, hanging from the ceiling, gilded rain gutters from the same place. To the right a room contains a hair of Prophet Mohammed's beard, his footprint in clay, his sword, tooth and more. An imam is often sitting in a glass booth here and chanting passages from the Quran. The 'felicitous cloak' itself resides in a golden casket in a small adjoining room.

Also in the Third Court are the **Quarters of Pages in Charge of the Sacred Safekeeping Rooms**, where the palace school for pages and janissaries was located. These days the building features exhibits of Turkish miniature paintings, calligraphy and portraits of the sultans.

The Treasury

The Treasury, with its incredible collection of precious objects and simply breathtaking views, is a highlight of a visit to the palace. The building itself was constructed by Mehmet the Conqueror in 1460 and has always been used to store works of art and treasure. In the first room, look for the jewel-encrusted **sword of Süleyman the Magnificent** and the **Throne of Ahmet I**, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and designed by Mehmet Ağa, architect of the Blue Mosque. In the second room, the tiny **Indian figures**, mainly made from seed pearls, are well worth seeking out, as are the bizarre and vaguely sinister relics of the **Arm and Skull of St John the Baptist**, which are encased in jewels.

After passing through the third room and having a gawk at the enormous gold and diamond **andlesticks** you come to a fourth room and the Treasury's most famous exhibit – the **Topkapı Dagger**. The object of the criminal quest in the 1964 movie *Topkapı*, it features three enormous emeralds on the hilt and a watch set into the pommel. Also here is the **Spoonmaker's Diamond** (Kaşıkçı'nın Elması), a teardrop-shaped 86-carat rock surrounded by several dozen smaller stones. First worn by Mehmet IV at his accession to the throne in 1648, it is the world's fifth-largest diamond. It is called the Spoonmaker's Diamond because it was originally found in a rubbish dump in Eğrikapı and purchased by a street peddler for three spoons.

Fourth Court

Pleasure pavilions occupy the northeastern part of the palace, sometimes called the Tulip Gardens or Fourth Court. A late addition to Topkapı, the **Mecidiye Köşkü** was built by Abdül Mecit (r 1839–61). Beneath it is the Konyalı restaurant (p141); if you plan to eat here, try to arrive before noon or after 2pm to be sure of a table on the terrace.

Up the stairs at the end of the Tulip Garden are two of the most enchanting buildings in the palace, joined by a marble terrace with a beautiful pool. Murat IV (r 1623–40) built the **Revan Kiosk** in 1636 after reclaiming the city of Yerevan (now in Armenia) from Persia. In 1639 he constructed the **Baghdad Kiosk**, one of the last examples of classical palace architecture, to commemorate his victory over that city. Notice the superb İznik tiles, the mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell inlay, and the woodwork.

Jutting out from the terrace is the golden roof of the **İftariye Baldachin**, the most popular happy-snap spot in the palace grounds. İbrahim the Mad built this small structure in 1640 as a picturesque place to break the daily Ramadan fast.

At the west end of the terrace is the **Circumcision Room** (Sünnet Odası), used for the ritual that admits Muslim boys to manhood. Built by İbrahim in 1641, the outer walls of the chamber are graced by particularly beautiful tile panels.

GÜLHANE PARK

Once the park of the Topkapı Palace, crowds of locals now come to Gülhane Park (Map pp96–7) at weekends to enjoy its shade. Do as the locals do and head to the north end of the park to the **Set Üstü Çay Bahçesi** (see p147), with superb views over the Bosphorus.

To the left of the south exit is a bulbous kiosk built into the park wall. Known as the **Alay Köşkü** (Parade Kiosk), this is where the sultan would sit and watch the periodic parades of troops and trade guilds commemorating great holidays and military victories.

Across the street from the Alay Köşkü (not quite visible from the Gülhane gate) is an outrageously curvaceous rococo gate leading into the precincts of what was once the grand vizierate, or Ottoman prime ministry, known in the West as the **Sublime Porte**. Today the buildings beyond the gate hold various government offices.

İSTANBUL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

It may not pull the number of visitors that flock to nearby Topkapı, but this **museum** (Arkeoloji Müzeleri; Map pp96–7; ☎ 0212-520 7740; Osman Hamdi Bey Yokuşu, Gülhane; admission €3; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Tue–Sun) shouldn't be missed. It can be reached easily by walking down the slope from Topkapı's First Court, or by trudging up the hill from the main gate of Gülhane Park. Allow at least two hours.

The complex is divided into three buildings: the Archaeology Museum (Arkeoloji Müzesi), the Museum of the Ancient Orient (Eski Şark Eserler Müzesi) and the Tiled Kiosk (Çinili Köşk). These museums house the palace collections, formed during the 19th century by archaeologist Osman Hamdi (1842–1910) and added to greatly since the republic was proclaimed. Excellent interpretive panels are in both Turkish and English.

The first building on your left as you enter is the **Museum of the Ancient Orient**. Overlooking the park, it was designed by Alexander Valaury and built in 1883 to house the Academy of Fine Arts. It displays Anatolian pieces from Hittite empires and pre-Islamic items collected from the Ottoman Empire.

A Roman statue of the god **Bes** greets you as you enter the **Archaeology Museum** on the opposite side of the courtyard. Turn left into Room 1 and walk into the dimly lit rooms beyond, where the museum's major treasures – sarcophagi from the **Royal Necropolis of Sidon** – are displayed. Osman Hamdi unearthed these sarcophagi in Sidon (Side in modern-day Lebanon) in 1887, and in 1891 persuaded the sultan to build the museum to house them.

In Room 2 you will see a sarcophagus that is Egyptian in origin, but which was later reused by **King Tabnit of Sidon**; his mummy lies close by. Also here is a beautifully preserved **Lycian Sarcophagus** made from Paros marble and dating from the end of the 5th century. Next to this is the **Satrap Sarcophagus**.

After admiring these, pass into Room 3 to see the famous marble **Alexander Sarcophagus**, one of the most accomplished of all classical artworks and known as the Alexander Sarcophagus because it depicts the Greek general among his army battling the Persians. (It was actually sculpted for King Abdalonymos of Sidon, not Alexander, though.) Truly exquisite, it is carved out of Pentelic marble and dates from the last quarter of the 4th century

BC. One side shows the Persians (long pants, material headwear) battling with the Greeks. Alexander, on horseback, sports the Nemean Lion's head as a headdress, symbol of Hercules. The other side depicts the violent thrill of a lion hunt. Remarkably, the sculpture has remnants of its original red-and-yellow paintwork.

At the end of this room the **Mourning Women Sarcophagus** also bears traces of its original paintwork. Its depiction of the women is stark and very moving.

Turn back and walk past Bes to Room 4, the first of six **galleries of statues**, which are all worth visiting. Copies of some statues have been painted with gaudy colours as they would have appeared originally.

The annexe behind the main ground-floor gallery has the **Children's Museum**. While children will be bored stiff with the naff dioramas of early Anatolian life, they will no doubt be impressed by the large-scale model of the Trojan horse, which they can climb into. Beside the Children's Museum is the **Neighbouring Cultures of Istanbul** gallery, with a Byzantium collection including a stunning mosaic depicting Orpheus, and an equally impressive small mosaic of St Eudocia. If you have even a passing interest in Istanbul's rich archaeology, don't miss the mezzanine level above showcasing **'Istanbul Through the Ages'**. After seeing the displays here you can appreciate how much of the ancient city remains covered.

The last of the complex's museum buildings is the gorgeous **Tiled Kiosk** of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror. Thought to be the oldest surviving nonreligious Turkish building in Istanbul, it was built in 1472 as an outer pavilion of Topkapı Palace and was used for watching sporting events.

Bazaar District

Crowned by the city's first and most evocative shopping mall – the famous Grand Bazaar (Kapalı Çarşı) – the bazaar district is also home to two of the grandest of all Ottoman buildings, the Süleymaniye and Beyazit Camiis. For details on exploring a much lesser-known part of this district, see the boxed text, p109.

GRAND BAZAAR

The labyrinthine, chaotic, chintzy **Grand Bazaar** (Kapalı Çarşı, Covered Market; Map pp98–9 for location, Map p116 for detailed map; ☎ 8.30am–7pm Mon–Sat) is the

heart of Istanbul and has been for centuries. No visit to Istanbul would be complete without a stop here.

With over 4000 shops and several kilometres of lanes, as well as mosques, banks, police stations, restaurants and workshops, the bazaar is a covered world. Although there's no doubt that it's a tourist trap *par excellence*, it's also a place where business deals are done between locals and import/export businesses flourish.

Starting from a small masonry *bedesten* (market enclosure) built during the time of Mehmet the Conqueror, the bazaar grew to cover a vast area as neighbouring shopkeepers decided to put up roofs and porches so that commerce could be conducted comfortably in all weather. Finally, a system of locked gates and doors was provided so that the entire minicity could be closed up tight at the end of the business day.

Before you visit, prepare yourself properly. Make sure you're in a good mood and energised, ready to swap friendly banter with the hundreds of shopkeepers who will attempt to lure you into their establishments.

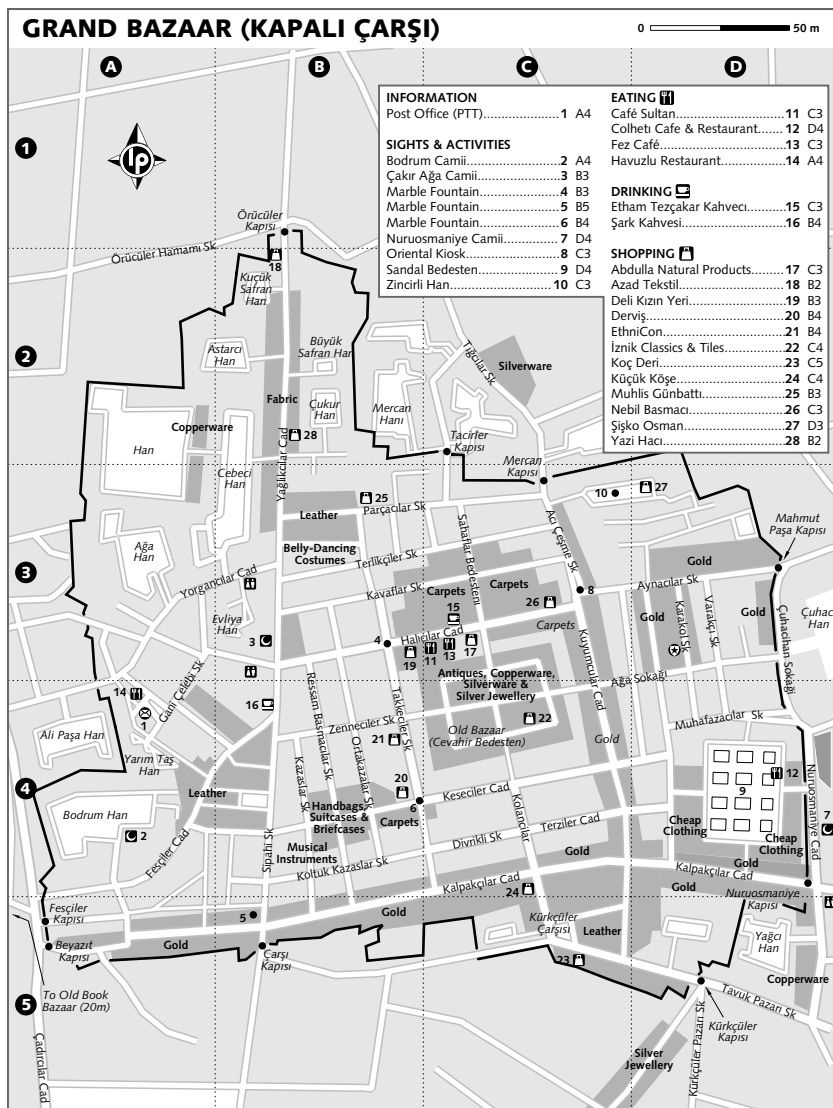
When you get to the bazaar, leave the main streets for tourists, tuck your guidebook in your daypack, and explore the alleys concentrated around the western end. Peep through doorways to find hidden *hans* (caravanserais), take every sidestreet to dig out those teeny boutiques and workshops. Get dizzy on *çay* (tea), compare price after price and try your hand at the art of bargaining. Allow at least three hours here; some travellers spend three days!

On your wanderings you may pass the crooked **Oriental Kiosk**, and, just north from it up Acı Çeşme Sokak, the gorgeous pink **Zincirli Han**.

BEYAZIT SQUARE & İSTANBUL UNIVERSITY

The Sahaflar Çarşısı (Old Book Bazaar) is next to **Beyazit Camii** (Mosque of Sultan Beyazit II; Map pp98–9). Beyazit specified that an exceptional amount of marble, porphyry, verd antique and rare granite be used in this mosque, which he had built between 1501 and 1506.

The large cobbled square here is officially called Hüriyet Meydanı (Freedom Sq), although everyone knows it simply as Beyazit. Under the Byzantines this was the Forum of Theodosius, the largest of the city's many



forums, built by the emperor in AD 393. The square is backed by the impressive portal of İstanbul University.

SÜLEYMANİYE CAMİİ

The **Süleymaniye** (Mosque of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent; Map pp98-9; Prof Sıddık Sami Onar Caddesi; donation requested) crowns one of the seven hills

dominating the Golden Horn and provides a magnificent landmark for the entire city. It was commissioned by the greatest, richest and most powerful of Ottoman sultans, Süleyman the Magnificent (r 1520–66), and was the fourth imperial mosque built in İstanbul.

Although it's not the largest of the Ottoman mosques, the Süleymaniye is certainly the

grandest. It was designed by Mimar Sinan, the most famous and talented of all Imperial architects. Although Sinan described the smaller Selimiye Camii in Edirne as his best work, he chose to be buried here in the Süleymaniye complex, probably knowing that this would be the building by which he would be best remembered. His tomb is just outside

THE GREAT SINAN

Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent's reign is known as the golden age of the Ottoman Empire, but it was not only his codification of Ottoman law and military prowess that earned him respect, but also his penchant for embellishing İstanbul with architectural wonders. But Süleyman couldn't have done this without Mimar Sinan (c 1497–1588), Turkey's best-known and greatest architect. Together they perfected the design of the classic Ottoman mosque.

A Sinan mosque has a large forecourt with a central *şadırvan* (ablutions fountain) and domed arcades on three sides. On the fourth side stands the mosque, with a two-storey porch. The main prayer hall is covered by a large central dome rising much higher than the two-storey façade, and surrounded by smaller domes and semidomes.

İstanbul's superb **Süleymaniye Camii** (opposite) is the grandest and most visited work of Sinan's, so if you only have time to visit one of Sinan's masterpieces make this it. The smaller, tile encrusted **Rüstem Paşa Camii** (right) and **Sokollu Mehmet Paşa Camii** (Map pp96–7) are both exquisite, well rewarding anyone who makes the effort to see them.

Sinan did not only design and construct mosques. The **Çemberlitaş Hamamı** (p133) is one of his works, giving you a perfect excuse to blend your architectural studies with a pampering session. He also built the **Baths of Lady Hürrem** (p105) and the **Caferaga Medresesi** (p154).

Sinan's works survive in other towns of the Ottoman heartland, particularly Edirne, the one-time capital of the Empire. Sinan considered that city's **Selimiye Camii** (p167) to be his finest work.

The tomb of Mimar Sinan (Map pp98–9) can be found to the north of the Süleymaniye Camii.

the mosque's walled garden in the northern corner.

Inside, the mosque is breathtaking in its size and pleasing in its simplicity. There's little decoration except for some fine İznik tiles in the *mihrab* (niche indicating the direction of Mecca), gorgeous stained-glass windows done by one Ibrahim the Drunkard, and four massive columns, one from Baalbek, one from Alexandria and two from Byzantine palaces in İstanbul.

If you are lucky enough to visit when the stairs to the gallery on the northeast side (facing the Golden Horn) are open, make sure you go upstairs to the balcony. The views from this vantage point are spectacular. You can enjoy similar views from the terrace outside.

The *külliye* (mosque complex) of the Süleymaniye, which is outside the walled garden, is particularly elaborate, with the full complement of public services: soup kitchen, hostel, hospital, theological college etc. Today the soup kitchen, with its charming garden courtyard, houses the Darüzzıyafe Restaurant. Although a lovely place to enjoy a cup of tea (€0.50), the food was all but inedible on our recent visits. **Lale Bahçesi** (p148), located in a sunken courtyard next to Darüzzıyafe, is an atmospheric hang-out for uni students, here for a chat, *çay* and nargileh.

Near the southeast wall of the mosque is its cemetery, home to the **tombs** (☞ 9.30am–4.30pm) of Süleyman and Roxelana. The tile work in both is superb.

RÜSTEM PAŞA CAMİİ

Plonked in the middle of the busy Tahtakale district to the west of the Spice Bazaar, the little-visited **Rüstem Paşa Camii** (Mosque of Rüstem Paşa; Map pp98-9; Hasırçılar Caddesi; donation requested) is an absolute gem. Built in 1560 by Sinan for the son-in-law and grand vizier of Süleyman the Magnificent, it is a showpiece of the best Ottoman architecture and tile work, albeit on a small scale.

At the top of the entry steps there's a terrace and the mosque's colonnaded porch. You'll notice at once the panels of İznik tiles set into the mosque's façade. The interior is covered in similarly gorgeous tiles and features a lovely dome, supported by four tiled pillars.

The preponderance of tiles was Rüstem Paşa's way of signalling his wealth and influence to the world, İznik tiles being particularly expensive and desirable. It may not have

assisted his passage into the higher realm, though, because by all accounts he was a loathsome character. His contemporaries dubbed him *Kehle-I-Ikbal* (the Louse of Fortune) because he was found to be infested with lice before his marriage to Mihrimah, Süleyman's favourite daughter. He is best remembered for plotting with Roxelana to turn Süleyman against his favourite son, Mustafa. They were successful and Mustafa was strangled in 1553 on his father's orders.

The mosque is easy to miss because it's not at street level. Look to the left of the ablutions block on the street and you'll see a stone doorway marked by a silver plaque. A flight of steps next to this leads up to the mosque.

SPICE BAZAAR

Need a herbal love potion or some natural Turkish Viagra? İstanbul's **Spice Bazaar** (Mısır Çarşısı, Egyptian Market; Map pp98-9; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) is the place to find them, although we wouldn't vouch for the efficacy of either! The market was constructed in the 1660s as part of the Yeni Cami complex, the rents from the shops going to support the upkeep of the mosque and its charitable activities. It was called the Egyptian Market because it was famous for selling goods shipped in from Cairo.

As well as *baharat* (spices), nuts, honeycomb and olive-oil soaps, the bustling spice bazaar sells truckloads of *incir* (figs), *lokum* (Turkish delight) and fruit pressed into sheets and *pestil* (dried). Although the number of shops selling tourist trinkets increases annually, this is still a great place to stock up on edible souvenirs, share a few jokes with the vendors and marvel at the well-preserved building. Make sure you visit shop number 41, the atmospheric **Mehmet Kalmaz Baharatçı**, which specialises in henna, teats, potions, lotions and the Sultan's very own aphrodisiac. Most of the shops offer vacuum packaging which makes getting souvenirs home easy.

This is also the place to come to try some of Turkey's cheeses. Erzincan's famous *tulum* cheeses are sold here; look for the hairy goat skin (see p70). The bazaar is also home to one of the city's oldest restaurants, *Pandelî* (p142).

YENİ CAMİ

Only in İstanbul would a 400-year-old mosque be called 'New'. The **Yeni Cami** (New Mosque; Map pp96-7; Yeniciami Meydanı Sokak, Eminönü; donation re-

quested) was begun in 1597, commissioned by Valide Sultan Safiye, mother of Sultan Mehmet III (r 1595-1603). Safiye lost her august position when her son the sultan died, and the mosque was completed six sultans later in 1663 by Turhan Hadice, mother of Sultan Mehmet IV (r 1648-87).

In plan, the Yeni Cami is much like the Blue Mosque and the Süleymaniye Camii, with a large forecourt and square sanctuary surmounted by a series of semidomes crowned by a grand dome. The interior is richly decorated with gold, coloured İznik tiles and carved marble, and has an impressive *mihrab*.

In the courtyard near the Spice Bazaar is the **tomb of Valide Sultan Turhan Hadice**. Buried with her are no fewer than six sultans, including her son Mehmet IV.

GALATA BRIDGE

Nothing is quite as evocative as walking across the Galata Bridge (Map pp96-7). At sunset, when the Galata Tower is surrounded by the silhouettes of shrieking seagulls and the mosques atop the seven hills of the city are thrown into relief against a soft red-pink sky, it is spectacularly beautiful. During the day, it carries a constant flow of İstanbul crossing between Beyoğlu and Eminönü, a long line of hopeful anglers trailing their lines into the waters below and a constantly changing procession of street vendors hawking everything from fresh-baked *simit* to Rolex rip-offs.

Underneath the bridge, fish restaurants and cafés on its lower level serve drinks and food all day. Come here to inhale the evocative scent of apple tobacco wisping out from the nargileh cafés and to watch the passing parade of ferry traffic plying the waters. The eateries below the bridge are much of a muchness, and frankly shameless tourist traps, but the treat of having a meal or a late afternoon beer here and soaking up the views is worth the cultural cringe.

This bridge was built in 1994 to replace an iron structure dating from around 1910, which in turn had replaced three earlier structures. The 1910 bridge was famous for its seedy fish restaurants, tea houses and nargileh joints that occupied the dark recesses beneath its roadway, but it had a major flaw: it floated on pontoons that blocked the natural flow of water and kept the Golden Horn from flushing out pollution. In 1992 the iron bridge was damaged by fire and dragged up the Golden

Horn to RIP; you pass it on the ferry on the way to Eyüp.

Beyoğlu & Around

The suburb of Beyoğlu (*bey-oh-loo*) rises from the shoreline north of the Galata Bridge, and incorporates both Taksim Sq and the grand boulevard, İstiklal Caddesi. By the mid-19th century it was known as Pera, the 'European' quarter of town, home to diplomats and traders, and buzzing with the latest European fashions, European-style patisseries, restaurants, boutiques and embassies all built following the European architectural style of the day. Beyoğlu had telephones, electric light and the one of the first electric tramways in the world, the Tünel.

However all this changed in the decades after the Republic when the embassies moved to the country's new capital, Ankara, the glamorous shops and restaurants closed, the grand buildings crumbled, and Beyoğlu took on a decidedly sleazy air. Fortunately the '90s brought about a rebirth. Beyoğlu is once again the heart of modern İstanbul, ground-zero for galleries, cafés and boutiques, with hip new restaurants opening almost nightly, and more bars than a bar-hopper could hope to prop at in a lifetime. Beyoğlu is a showcase of cosmopolitan Turkey at its best – miss Beyoğlu and you haven't seen İstanbul.

SEEING THE DERVISHES WHIRL

The Mevlevi have always welcomed all who wished to witness the *sema* (ceremony), including foreign, non-Muslim visitors. Although banned for a short period in the 1920s by Atatürk, the tradition remained strong and continues today.

There are a growing number of opportunities in İstanbul to see the dervishes whirl, but frankly most of them are little more than tourist shows. The best place to see an authentic *sema*, where a handful of travellers join local followers in this spiritual rite, is in one of the few practicing *tekke* in İstanbul at Fatih, some 4km west of Sultanahmet. It's usually only on Monday nights and it's best to come here with a local escort. You could ask at your hotel, or Les Arts Turcs (see p135) takes travellers from their studio, after giving them a one-hour information session about Sufism and the ceremony (€22).

The second-best option is at the Museum of Court Literature (see above), where **semas** (tickets €14; ☎ 5pm Sat & Sun May-Sep, 3pm 1st & last Sat of month Oct-Apr) last for 90 minutes, starting with a live performance of Sufi music. It's a good idea to buy tickets from the monastery a few days beforehand as the shows are often booked out. Make sure you arrive early and enter the *tekke* (dervish lodge) as soon as the door is opened so that you can get a seat. The best seats are those near the rear windows, on the opposite side to the entrance.

There is also a **performance** (☎ 0212-458 8834; tickets adult/student €17/14; ☎ 7.30pm Wed, Fri & Sun) in the atmospheric exhibition hall on platform 1 at Sirkeci Train Station in Sultanahmet.

Remember that the ceremony is a religious one – by whirling the adherents believe that they are attaining a higher union with God – so don't talk, leave your seat or take flash photographs while the dervishes are spinning. For more information on the whirling dervishes, see p486.

The best way to experience Beyoğlu is to spend an afternoon or day exploring by foot. You can walk across the Galata Bridge from Eminönü and up through Galata, the city's historic Genoese neighbourhood, and along heaving İstiklal Caddesi to Taksim Sq (from where you can catch the T4 bus back to Sultanahmet if you wish). All up it's a walk of two to three hours allowing for breaks along the way.

GALATA TOWER

The **Galata Tower** (Galata Kulesi; Map pp100-1; Galata Meydanı, Karaköy; admission €5.50; ☎ 9am-8pm), originally constructed in 1348, was the highest point in the Genoese fortifications of Galata and has been rebuilt many times. It has survived several earthquakes, as well as the demolition of the rest of the Genoese walls in the mid-19th century. Today it holds a forgettable restaurant/nightclub but a pleasant cafeteria on the 8th floor where you can enjoy a drink (tea €0.80, beer €3). There's also a vertiginous panorama balcony offering spectacular 360-degree views of the city.

MEVLEVİ MONASTERY

The **Museum of Court Literature** (Divan Edebiyatı Müzesi; Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 4141; Galipdede Caddesi 15, Tünel; admission €2; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Wed-Mon), in the Mevlevi Monastery, is one of only a

handful of functioning *tekkes* (dervish lodges) remaining in İstanbul. It's a slightly run-down compound and is really only worth visiting if you're here to see the *sema* (ceremony; see p119 for details), and/or you feel like catching respite from the hubbub of Beyoğlu in the pleasant, shady gardens.

As you approach the *tekke*, notice the graveyard on the left and its stones with graceful Ottoman inscriptions. The shapes atop the stones reflect the headgear of the deceased, each hat denoting a different religious rank. The tomb of Galip Dede, the 17th century Sufi poet who gave his name to the street, lies here.

Inside the *semahane* (ceremonial hall), the central area is for the whirling *sema* (ceremony), while the galleries above were for visitors. Separate areas were set aside for the orchestra and for female visitors (behind the lattices). These days, the upstairs is only for the musicians who play during the ceremony. In the display cases surrounding the central area there are exhibits of Mevlevi calligraphy, writing and musical instruments.

İSTANBUL MODERN

Opened in 2004, **İstanbul Modern** (İstanbul Modern Sanat Müzesi; Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-334 7300; www.istanbulmodern.org; Medis-i Mebusan Caddesi, Fındıklı; admission €4, free admission Thu; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue & Wed, 10am-8pm Thu, 10am-6pm Fri-Sun) is an excellent introduction to contemporary art in Turkey.

The collection is small but well curated, with everything from the photography of Ara Güler to Eren Eyüboğlu and Fikret Mualla. The 1st floor hosts permanent exhibits, while the ground floor shows largely international touring works, retrospectives and photography. There's a well-stocked shop, a **cinema** that shows arthouse films and a really great-looking café-restaurant with superb views of the Bosphorus. Allow at least an hour.

İSTİKLAL CADESİ

Stretching from Tünel Sq to Taksim Sq, in the late 19th century **İstiklal Caddesi** (Independence Ave; Map pp100-1) was known as the Grande Rue de Pera, carrying the life of the modern city up and down its lively promenade. It's still the life and soul of the party and a stroll along its length is a must. Come between 4pm and 8pm daily – especially on Friday and Saturday – and you'll see İstiklal at its busiest best.

About half-way along İstiklal Caddesi is the **Galatasaray Lycée** (Map pp100-1), founded

in 1868 by Sultan Abdülaziz as a school where students were taught in French, as well as Turkish. Today it's a prestigious public school.

Closeby is the famous **Çiçek Pasajı** (Flower Passage; Map pp100-1). When the *Orient Express* rolled into Old Stamboul and promenading down İstiklal Caddesi was all the rage the Cité de Pera building was the most glamorous address in town. Built in 1876 and decorated in Second Empire style, it housed a shopping arcade as well as apartments. As Pera declined, so too did the building, its stylish shops giving way to florists and then *meyhanes* where enthusiastic revellers caroused the night away. In the late 1970s parts of the building collapsed; once rebuilt, the passage was 'beautified' and its raffish charm was lost. These days locals bypass the touts and the mediocre food on offer here and make their way behind the passage to İstanbul's most colourful and popular eating precinct, **Nevizade Sokak** (see the boxed text, p146).

Next to the Çiçek Pasajı you'll find Şahne Sokak and Beyoğlu's **Balık Pazarı** (Fish Market), with stalls selling fruit, vegetables, pickles and other produce. Leading off the Balık Pazarı you'll find the neoclassical **Avrupa Pasajı** (European Passage), a small gallery with marble paving and shops selling tourist wares and some antique goods; and **Aslıhan Pasajı**, a two-storey arcade bursting with second-hand books.

TAKSİM SQUARE

The symbolic heart of modern İstanbul, this busy square (Map pp100-1) is named after the stone *taksim* (reservoir) on its western side, once part of the city's old water-conduit system. The main water line from the Belgrade Forest, north of the city, was laid to this point in 1732 by Sultan Mahmut I (r 1730-54). Branch lines then led from the *taksim* to other parts of the city.

Hardly a triumph of urban design, the square is a bit of a chaotic mess. At its western end, the İstiklal Caddesi tram circumnavigates the **Cumhuriyet Anıtı** (Republic Monument), created by an Italian architect-sculptor team in 1928. It features Atatürk, his assistant and successor İsmet İnönü and other revolutionary leaders.

On the square's north side is the hectic bus terminus (where you can catch the T4 to Sultanahmet); on its east the **Atatürk Cul-**

tural Centre, and the west, the Marmara hotel (p140). In the middle is the metro running up to Levent 4, and the funicular tram running down to Kabatas.

ASKERİ MÜZESİ (MILITARY MUSEUM)

For a rousing experience, present yourself at this splendid **Military Museum** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-233 2720; Vali Konağı Caddesi, Harbiye; adult/student €3/1.50; 🕒 9am-5pm Wed-Sun), 1km north of Taksim.

The museum is spread over two very large floors. On the ground floor are displays of medieval weapons and armour, military uniforms, and glass cases holding battle standards, both Turkish and captured. Some of the most interesting exhibits are the *sayebanlar* (imperial pavilions). These luxurious cloth shelters, heavily worked with fine silver and gold thread, jewels, precious silks and elegant tracery, were the battle headquarters for sultans during the summer campaign season.

Our favourite exhibit is a length of the chain that the Byzantines stretched across the Golden Horn in the fateful siege of 1453. For military memorabilia, only a plank from the Trojan horse could beat that!

The upper floor has displays on WWI and the War of Independence, including a hall devoted to Atatürk.

The easiest way to get to the museum is to walk up Cumhuriyet Caddesi from Taksim Sq. This will take around 15 minutes. Alternatively, take any bus heading up Cumhuriyet Caddesi from Taksim Sq. Try to visit in the afternoon so that you can enjoy the concert given by the Mehter, the medieval Ottoman Military Band, which occurs between 3pm and 4pm daily.

Beşiktaş & Ortaköy DOLMABAĞÇE PALACE

These days it's fashionable for critics influenced by the form-is-function aesthetic to sneer at buildings such as **Dolmabahçe Palace** (Dolmabahçe Sarayı; Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-236 9000; Dolmabahçe Caddesi, Beşiktaş; admission selamlık only €8.50, harem-cariyeler only €7, selamlık & harem-cariyeler €12, crystal palace & clock museum €3; 🕒 9am-4pm Tue-Wed & Fri-Sun). Enthusiasts for Ottoman heritage also decry this flourish of the imperial dynasty, finding it shares more in common with the Paris Opera than Topkapı Palace. But whatever the critics may say, judging by the queues the 19th-century imperial residence is a clear crowd favourite.

More is less was certainly *not* the philosophy of Sultan Abdül Mecit, who, deciding that it was time to give lie to talk of Ottoman military and financial decline, decided to move from Topkapı to a lavish new palace on the shores of the Bosphorus. For a site he chose the *dolma bahçe* (filled-in garden) where a predecessor Sultan Ahmet I (r 1607-17) had built an imperial pleasure kiosk surrounded by gardens. In 1843 Abdül Mecit commissioned architects Nikoğos and Garabed Balyan to construct an Ottoman-European palace that would impress everyone who set eyes on it. Construction was completed in 1856. Traditional Ottoman palace architecture was rejected in favour of baroque and neoclassical. Eschewing pavilions, the palace turns in on itself – sadly, given what might have been splendid Bosphorus views. But clearly nothing was to detract from the palace's extravagant interior.

The palace, which is set in well-tended gardens and entered through an ornate gate, is divided into two sections, the over-the-top **selamlık** (ceremonial suites) and the slightly more restrained **harem-cariyeler** (harem and concubines' quarters). You must take a guided tour to see either section (*selamlık* half-hour tour, *harem-cariyeler*, one hour tour). If you only have enough time for one tour, be sure to make it the *selamlık*. Tours are in English and Turkish.

At the end of your tour, make sure you visit the **Crystal Palace**, with its fairy tale-like conservatory featuring etched-glass windows, crystal fountain and myriad chandeliers. There's even a crystal piano and chair. It's next to the aviary on the street side of the palace.

Finally, don't set your watch by any of the palace clocks, all of them stopped at 9.05am, the moment at which Atatürk died in Dolmabahçe on 10 November 1938. When touring the harem you will be shown the quarters he used when he spent time here. Most restrained by Dolmabahçe standards.

The tourist entrance to the palace is near the ornate **clock tower** built by Sultan Abdül Hamit II in 1890-94. There is an outdoor café near here with premium Bosphorus views.

If you want to visit Beylerbeyi Sarayı (see p129) on the Asian shore after the Dolmabahçe, you can take a **guided tour** (☎ 0212-296 5240; tour €30; 9am from the Dolmabahçe summer only, book ahead), which includes a return crossing of the Bosphorus in a replica of an imperial caique.

DENİZ MÜZESİ

Although this **museum** (Naval Museum; Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-261 0040; cnr Cezayir & Beşiktaş Caddesi, Beşiktaş; adult/student €2/1; 🕒 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Wed-Sun) is picturesquely situated on the Bosphorus shore, most landlubbers (including us) find it a tad dull. Compasses, guns, ensigns, model ships, yada yada. Still, those of the naval persuasion will no doubt feel like dropping anchor here for an hour or so.

Those with a particular interest in things military may also be pleased to know that if they come out of the museum and walk straight down to the shore they'll find a line of dolmuşes waiting to run them straight to the Military Museum in Harbiye.

To get here, catch the T4 bus from Sultanahmet to Dolmabahçe and walk the last 10 minutes; or take 40T from Taksim Sq and alight in Beşiktaş.

YILDIZ PARK

A pretty, leafy oasis alive with birds and picnickers, **Yıldız Park** (Yıldız Park; Map pp94-5; Çırağan Caddesi; admission free) is the place to come if you need to escape İstanbul's hullabaloo. Once the imperial gardens of nearby Çırağan Palace, it has two grandiose *köşkü* (pavilions), where the sultans could enjoy their surrounds in style, and another Ottoman-European palace, Yıldız Şale.

If you enter from the main entrance, at Çırağan Caddesi, walk 10 minutes up the steep main road to the T intersection at the top. Turn left for the **Çadır Köşkü**. Built between 1865 and 1870, this ornate kiosk is now a low-key café beside a lake.

Turn right at the T intersection to find the entrance to **Yıldız Şale** (Yıldız Chalet Museum; Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-259 4570; admission €3; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Tue-Wed & Fri-Sun Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-May). Sultan Abdül Hamit II (r 1876-1909) didn't allow himself to be upstaged by his predecessors. He built his own fancy chalet here in 1882, expanded it in 1898 for a state visit by Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany. As you enter, a guide will approach and give you a half-hour tour. Although the chalet isn't as plush as Dolmabahçe, it's a lot less crowded.

Around 500m past the turn-off to Yıldız Şale you'll come to the **Malta Köşkü** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-258 9453; mains €8.50-10; 🕒 9am-10.30pm). Built in 1870, this was where Abdül Hamit imprisoned the deposed Murat V and his family. With its views of the Bosphorus, the

terrace café here is a great place for a light lunch.

If you come to the park by taxi, have it take you up the steep slope to Yıldız Şale; you can visit the other kiosks on the walk down. A taxi from Sultanahmet to the top of the hill should cost around €5.

ORTAKÖY CAMII

Ortaköy (Middle Village; Map pp94-5) is a charming waterside suburb with church, synagogue and mosque surrounding a jumble of Ottoman buildings renovated as stylish boutiques, bars and eateries. On balmy nights the restaurants and cafés lining the teeny cobbled square by the water overflow with locals enjoying tea, a fish meal and some of the city's best people-watching.

Right on the water's edge, the decorative **Ortaköy Camii** (Büyük Mecidiye Camii) is the work of Nikoğos Balyan, one of the architects of Dolmabahçe Palace. A strange mix of baroque and neoclassical influences, it was designed and built for Sultan Abdül Mecit III in 1853-55. With the supermodern Bosphorus Bridge looming behind it, the mosque provides the classic photo opportunity for those wanting to illustrate İstanbul's 'old meets new' character. On the Bosphorus Bridge side of the mosque is an excellent (by İstanbul standards) children's playground and a handful of second-hand book stalls (with titles in English, German and French).

Try to time your visit for Sunday, when the bustling street market fills the cobbled lanes. Early risers make it for breakfast, then pick through the market's beaded jewellery, hats, and other crafty trinkets, before heading home around midday to avoid the afternoon traffic crush. See p145 for our favourite eating picks.

To get here catch bus Nos DT1, 40, 40T from Taksim Sq or bus No 25E from Eminönü (get off at the Kabataş Lisesi bus stop). If you're coming from Sultanahmet, you could catch the tram to Kabataş, and then jump on bus No 25E or catch a taxi (€3) the rest of the way to Ortaköy.

Golden Horn

In Byzantine times the Golden Horn provided a perfect natural harbour for the city's commerce, with fresh vegetables, fruit and grains sold in markets along the water's edge. At the height of the Ottoman Empire, the

northern shore was used for pleasure and business. **Aynalıkavak Kasrı** (Map pp94-5) was an imperial lodge built as a rural retreat for the Sultans, while the area around Kasımpaşa and Hasköy became the Empire's docklands, arsenal, foundry and admiralty. The shorelines were dotted with villages and gardens, home to thriving Jewish and Greek neighbourhoods.

By the mid-20th century, however, the villages had merged, the forests were lost and the water had silted to become a forgotten, polluted waterway. It wasn't until the old Galata Bridge was replaced with a new one in 1994 that the pollution could be properly addressed, with parklands planted along its length and surrounding neighbourhoods on the road to recovery. The small local ferry that travels up its length is the best way to explore the Golden Horn (see p124). Some travellers find exploring this delightful little-visited pocket of İstanbul is a highlight of their visit.

FENER & BALAT

Once wealthy Greek and Jewish neighbourhoods, since the Republic, Fener and Balat had been left to decay. Recently, Unesco offered a grant to help restore these districts that harbour some of central İstanbul's last remaining traditional residential streets. These two interesting old suburbs are well worth a couple of hours of backstreet exploration.

The **Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarchate** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-531 9670/6; Sadrazam Ali Paşa Caddesi, Fener; 🕒 9am-5pm) is home to the Ecumenical patriarch. He is the ceremonial head of the Orthodox Church, though most of the churches in Greece, Cyprus, Russia, Romania and other countries have their own patriarchs or archbishops who are independent of İstanbul. Nevertheless, the symbolic importance of the patriarchate, here in the city that saw the great era of Byzantine and Orthodox influence, is considerable. After the conquest of Constantinople, the patriarchate moved from the buildings it used in Aya Sofya and finally found a home here around 1600. The Church of St George, inside the compound, dates from around 1730, and is well worth seeing. Every weekend busloads of pilgrims come for the Sunday morning divine literature.

Right on the waterfront near the Patriarchate stands one of the city's most intriguing architectural curiosities: the Gothic Revival cast-iron **Church of St Stephen of the Bulgars** (Map

pp94-5). This was constructed in Vienna, then shipped down the Danube and assembled here in 1898. It's not normally open to visitors, but if you stand at the gates, the caretaker will usually invite you in (well worth the effort). A donation is appreciated.

Les Arts Turcs (p135) and Istamboul Insolite (p135) run informative walking tours of these suburbs.

HASKÖY & SÜTLÜCE

The suburbs of Hasköy and Sütlüce on the northern shore of the Golden Horn are home to two attractions: Rahmi M Koç Müzesi and Miniaturk. If you're coming by the Golden Horn ferry, the closest stop to both sights is Sütlüce.

Miniaturk

To be frank, we're at an absolute loss as to why this **theme park** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-222 2882; İmrahor Caddesi, Sütlüce; admission adult/child or student €4/2; 🕒 9am-6pm) has been such an enormous hit with locals. Marketed as a miniature park that showcases 'all times and locations of Anatolia at the same place at the same time', it's a cheesy tiny town stocked with models of Turkey's great buildings – everything from the Celsus Library at Ephesus to Atatürk International Airport – set in manicured lawns dotted with fake rocks blasting a distorted recording of the Turkish national anthem. Children are disappointed with the models as they have to look from a distance but the miniature train that traverses the paths and the (none-too-safe) playground equipment is some recompense. Visit with tongue firmly in cheek.

The museum is about a 20-minute walk north of the Sütlüce ferry stop.

Rahmi M Koç Müzesi

This slick **museum** (Rahmi M Koç Industrial Museum; Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-369 6602; www.rmk-museum.org.tr; Hasköy Caddesi 27; adult/child or student €4/2; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun) was founded by the head of the Koç industrial group to exhibit artefacts from İstanbul's industrial past. Its collection is highly eclectic, giving the impression of being a grab-bag of cool stuff collected over the decades or stuff that has been donated to the museum by individuals, organisations or companies at a loss as to what else to do with it. This might sound as if we're damning the place with faint praise, but this is certainly not

the case. In fact, this is a corker of a museum that children in particular will love.

The museum is in two superbly restored sections: a historic docklands by the Golden Horn and a one-time Ottoman foundry opposite. Exhibits are largely concerned with forms of transport: a horse-drawn tram; an Amphicar (half car, half boat) that crossed the English Channel in 1962; Sultan Abdül Aziz's ornate railway coach; cars (everything from ugly Turkish Anadol models to fabulous pink Cadillacs); and a 1960 Messerschmitt. Other exhibits look at how appliances work and illustrate mechanical principles – young children in particular will love the levers, buttons and pulleys of these hands-on exhibits.

On weekends the historic Liman II tug-boat takes 40-minute tours of the Golden Horn (ticket €5.50) at 1pm, 2.30pm, 4pm and 5.30pm.

Unlike most of the city's museums, wheelchair access is offered throughout the complex and excellent interpretive panels in Turkish and English are provided. A private guide costs €25. There are two excellent restaurants (Halat restaurant, overlooking the Golden Horn, is the perfect spot for lunch), a café and a bar. The submarine exhibit, from which children under eight years of age are barred, requires an extra ticket (€2.50/1.50).

The museum is a 10-minute walk southeast of the Sütlüce ferry stop.

EYÜP

The conservative district of Eyüp is named after Ayub Ansari, a standard-bearer to the Prophet and a revered member of Islam's early leadership. His tomb by the **Eyüp Sultan Camii** (Mosque of the Great Eyüp; Map pp94-5; Camii Kebir Sokak, Eyüp; admission by donation; ☎ tomb 9.30am-4.30pm) makes this complex an extremely sacred place for Muslims, ranking fourth after the big three: Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. Don't miss the richly decorated tomb, but make sure you observe Islamic proprieties when visiting (note how pilgrims exit by walking backwards so they don't turn their back on Ayub Ansari). You should avoid visiting on Friday or on other Muslim holy days.

The original mosque built by Mehmet the Conqueror, just five years after the Conquest, was where Ottoman princes came to gird the Sword of Osman before their accession to the throne. The mosque you see today was built by Sultan Selim III in 1800. It's a popular

place for boys to visit on the day of their circumcision.

A cemetery meanders up the hill behind the mosque. Follow the path cutting up through the cemetery (or catch the cable car, north of the mosque) to the famous **Pierre Loti Café**, where the famous French novelist is said to have come for inspiration. And who could blame him? The views over the Golden Horn are magnificent.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Ferries run from Üsküdar, via Karaköy and Eminönü, all the way up the Golden Horn to Eyüp. Ferries stop at Kasımpaşa, Fener, Balat, Ayvansaray, Sütlüce and Eyüp. The first ferries leave Eminönü at 7.50am, 8.50am then hourly until 6.50pm and 8.05pm. To find the tiny ferry station at Eminönü, walk down the path between the Eminönü bus stand and the huge Stork Zyndan Restaurant.

Going the other way, the first from Eyüp leaves at 7.30am then hourly until 4.40pm, then 5.35pm, 6.30pm and 7.45pm. On weekends the late services may differ slightly – check the timetable. Consider hopping on and off the ferry, visiting sights along the way.

You can also catch buses along both shores of the Golden Horn. Buses 399B/C/D from Eminönü or bus Nos 55T and 55ET from Taksim Sq run via Fener and Balat to Eyüp. Bus 47 from Eminönü and 54HT from Taksim Sq run via the sights in Hasköy and Sütlüce (the northern shore).

Western Districts

Broadly described as the district between the city walls and Sultanahmet, this old part of İstanbul was once dotted with the churches of Byzantium. While most of the churches have been converted to mosques, and many of the houses are tumble-down or have been razed for ugly apartment blocks, a few hours' exploration in this area will give you a taste of work-a-day İstanbul. There are several sights worth visiting if you have the time, but the Kariye Müzesi is a must for any visit to İstanbul.

AQUEDUCT OF VALENS

It's not certain that the aqueduct (Map pp98-9) was constructed by the Emperor Valens (r 364-78), though we do know it was repaired in 1019, in later times by several sultans, and in the late 1980s. It's thought that the aque-

duct carried water over this valley to a cistern at Beyazıt Sq before finally ending up at the Basilica Cistern and the Great Byzantine Palace. After the Conquest it supplied the Eski (Old) and Topkapı Palaces with water.

ZEYREK CAMII

Originally part of an important Byzantine sanctuary comprising two churches, a chapel and a monastery is **Zeyrek Camii** (Church of the Pantocrator; Map pp98-9; İbadethane Sokak). The monastery is long gone and the northernmost church is derelict, but the southern church, built by Empress Eirene before her death in AD 1124 (she features in a mosaic at Aya Sofya with Emperor John II Comnenus), still has some features intact, including a magnificent mosaic floor. It and the attached chapel, built by John II, now function as a mosque. Outside prayer times a caretaker is usually available to show visitors around and will gratefully accept a donation in return. Ask him to open the trapdoor in the floor to reveal part of the mosaic floor. The mosque and the crumbling but charming houses in the surrounding streets are Unesco World Heritage listed – it's a great spot for a wander.

The Ottoman building to the east houses the **Zeyrekhané** restaurant (p146).

After you've visited Zeyrek, a very pleasant 15-minute walk can take you along a length of the Aqueduct of Valens northwest to Fatih Camii.

FATİH CAMII

This **mosque** (Mosque of the Conqueror; Map pp98-9; Fevzi Paşa Caddesi, Fatih), 750m northwest of the historic Aqueduct of Valens, was the first great imperial mosque to be built in İstanbul. Set in extensive grounds, the mosque complex was enormous and included 15 charitable establishments – religious schools, a hospice for travellers, a caravanserai and more. The mosque was finished in 1470 but was destroyed by an earthquake, rebuilt and then burnt down in 1782. What you see today dates from the reign of Abdül Hamit I (r 1774-89).

Be sure to look at the fine **tomb of the Conqueror** (☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) in the cemetery behind the mosque, though Mehmet is actually buried under the *mimber* in the mosque itself.

On Wednesday both the courtyard and the surrounding streets host a huge mar-

ket selling fresh produce and clothing. This is the best time to visit; at other times you may find the 18th-century mosque relatively unimpressive.

KARIYE MÜZESİ

Many visitors to İstanbul are amazed to discover that one of the highlights of their trip, the extraordinary **Kariye Müzesi** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-631 9241; Kariye Camii Sokak, Edirnekapi; admission €5.50; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Thu-Tue, until 6.30pm Jun-Oct), is tucked away in the little-visited western districts of the city.

The original name of this building was Chora Church, or the Church of the Holy Saviour Outside the Walls, but what you see today is not the first church-outside-the-walls on this site. Rather, this one was built in the late 11th century, with repairs, restructuring and conversion to a mosque in the succeeding centuries. Virtually all of the interior decoration dates from 1312 and was funded by Theodore Metochites, a poet and man of letters who was auditor of the treasury under Emperor Andronikos II (r 1282-1328). One of the museum's most wonderful mosaics, found above the door to the nave in the inner narthex, depicts Theodore offering the church to Christ.

The mosaics, which depict the lives of Christ and Mary, are simply stunning. Look out for the Deesis, which shows Christ and Mary with two donors: Prince Isaac Komnenos and Melane, daughter of Mikhael Palaiologos VIII. This is under the right dome in the inner narthex. On the dome itself is a wonderful depiction of Jesus and his ancestors (*the Genealogy of Christ*). On the narthex's left dome is a serenely beautiful mosaic of Mary and the Child Jesus surrounded by her ancestors.

In the nave are three mosaics: of Christ; of Mary and the child Jesus; and of the Dormition (Assumption) of the Blessed Virgin – turn around to see this as it's over the main door you just entered. The 'infant' being held by Jesus is actually Mary's soul.

To the right of the nave is the Parecclesion, a side chapel built to hold the tombs of the church's founder and his relatives, close friends and associates. It is decorated with frescoes that equal the mosaics in quality and depict Old Testament scenes.

The Kariye is one of the city's best museums and deserves an extended visit. On

leaving, we highly recommend sampling the delectable Ottoman menu at the Asitane restaurant (p146), which is in the basement of the next-door Kariye Oteli. Alternatively, a *peynirli tost* (toasted cheese sandwich, €3) or Turkish coffee (€2) can be enjoyed at the Kariye Pembe Köşk in the plaza overlooking the museum.

Finally, a plea: despite signs clearly prohibiting the use of flashes in the museum, many visitors wilfully ignore this rule. Please don't do the same – the future of these exquisite and delicate mosaics and frescoes is at stake.

To get here, catch bus Nos 28 or 36KE from Eminönü or bus No 87 from Taksim Sq to Edirnekapı. A taxi from Sultanahmet should cost €4, from Taksim €5.

YEDIKULE & THE CITY WALLS

Yedikule Hisarı (Fortress of the Seven Towers; Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-585 8933; Kule Meydanı 4, Yedikule; admission €2), looming over the old city's southern approaches, has a history as impressive as its massive structure.

In the late 4th century Theodosius I built a triumphal arch here. When the next Theodosius (r 408–50) built his great land walls, he incorporated the arch into it. Four of the fortress' seven towers were built as part of Theodosius II's walls; the other three, which are inside the walls, were added by Mehmet the Conqueror. Under the Byzantines, the great arch became known as the **Golden Gate** and was used for triumphal state processions into and out of the city. For a time, its gates were indeed plated with gold.

In Ottoman times the fortress was used for defence, and as a repository for the imperial treasury, a prison and a place of execution. After the Republic, Yedikule was neglected, becoming an overgrown green oasis, complete with goat herd. Recent renovations have disappointingly replaced the leafy greenery with acres of gravel. Still, the views from the battlements are the highlight of any visit.

It's possible to spend a day walking on top of or beside the walls all the way from Yedikule to Ayvansaray on the Golden Horn (6.5km), wandering past the late-13th-century **Tekfur Sarayı** (Palace of the Sovereign, Palace of Constantine Porphyrogenetus; Map pp94-5; Hocaçakır Caddesi) on the way. Be warned, though, that the walls are in a bad condition in many spots and go through some less-than-salubrious neighbourhoods. Don't consider doing this walk by yourself.

Yedikule is a long way from most other İstanbul sights and involves a special trip. Situated where the great city walls meet the Sea of Marmara, it's easily accessible by train from Sirkeci or Cankurtaran (the closest stop to Sultanahmet). Hop off the train at Yedikule (15 minutes), turn left as you come out of the station and walk about 500m to the entrance of the fortress.

You can also take bus 80 from Eminönü (these run approximately every 40 minutes) or bus 80T from Taksim (approximately every 25 minutes). The bus stop is across from the small park in front of the castle.

Asian Shore ÜSKÜDAR

Üsküdar (*oo-skoo-dar*) is the Turkish form of the name Scutari. The first colonists lived in Chalcedon (now Kadıköy), to the south, and Chrysolopolis (now Üsküdar) became its first major offshoot; both towns existed about two decades before Byzantium was founded. It soon became clear that the harbour at Chrysolopolis was superior to Chalcedon and, as Byzantium blossomed, Chrysolopolis outgrew Chalcedon to become the largest suburb on the Asian shore. Unwalled and therefore vulnerable, it became part of the Ottoman Empire at least 100 years before the Conquest.

Today Üsküdar is a bustling suburb with a handful of B-list sights worth seeing if you have a spare half-day. If you feel like a bite to eat, pop into the famous **Kanaat Lokantası** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0216-553 3791; Selmani Pak Caddesi 25; mains €6-9), offering some of İstanbul's best traditional meals. It's in the street behind the Ağa Camii.

Kız Kulesi

İstanbul is a maritime city, so it's appropriate that the **Kız Kulesi** (Maiden's Tower; Map pp94-5; ☎ 0216-342 4747; www.kizkulesi.com.tr; ☎ noon-7pm Tue-Sun), one of its most distinctive landmarks, is on the water. Arriving at Üsküdar by ferry, you'll notice the squat tower on a tiny island to the south, just off the Asian mainland. In ancient times a predecessor of the current 18th-century structure functioned as a toll-booth and defence point; the Bosphorus could be closed off by means of a chain stretching from here to Seraglio Point. Some think its ancient pedigree goes back even further, referring to it as Leander's Tower after the tragic youth who drowned after attempting

to swim across a strait to Europe to visit his lover, Hero (a story more usually associated with the Gallipoli peninsula). More recently, the tower featured in the 1999 Bond film *The World Is Not Enough*.

The tower is open to the public during the day as a café. At night it functions as a pricey **restaurant** (☎ 0216-342 4747; ☎ 8.30pm-1am Tue-Sun) serving a set menu (about €50 per person excluding drinks) with folk music or DJs, depending on the night. Small boats run from Salacak to the tower every 15 minutes from noon to 1am Tuesday to Sunday for €3 return. There are boats from Ortaköy at 1pm, 3pm and 5pm (€3.50); guests booking for dinner can catch a boat from Kabataş at 8.30pm, returning at 11.15pm or 12.15am.

Mosques

Judging that Scutari was the closest point in İstanbul to Mecca, many powerful Ottoman figures built mosques here to assist their passage to Paradise. Every year a big caravan sets out from here en route to Mecca and Medina for the Haj, further emphasising its reputation for piety.

As you leave Üsküdar dock, the main square, Demokrasi Meydanı, is right in front of you. Its northeastern corner is dominated by the **İskele Camii** (Map pp94-5), sometimes referred to as the Mihrimah Sultan Camii. This mosque was designed by Sinan for Süleyman the Magnificent's daughter in 1547-48.

South of the square is the **Yeni Valide Camii** (New Sultan's Mother Mosque; Map pp94-5). Featuring a wrought-iron 'birdcage' tomb in its overgrown garden, it was built by Sultan Ahmet III in 1708-10 for his mother Gülnuş Emetullah. East of the square is the **Ağa Camii** (Map pp94-5).

West of the square, overlooking the harbour, is the charming **Şemsi Paşa Camii** (Map pp94-5). Designed by Sinan and built in 1580 for Grand Vizier Şemsi Paşa, its modest size and decoration reflect the fact that its benefactor occupied the position of grand vizier for only a couple of months under Süleyman the Magnificent. Its *medrese* (seminary) has been converted into a library.

The **Atik Valide Camii** (Map pp94-5; Çinili Camii Sokak) is another of Sinan's works. It was built for Valide Sultan Nurbanu, wife of Selim II (the Sot) and mother of Murat III, in 1583. Nurbanu was captured by Turks on the Aegean island of Paros when she was 12 years old, and

went on to be a successful player in the Ottoman court. Murat adored his mother and on her death commissioned Sinan to build this monument to her on Üsküdar's highest hill. It has a pleasant courtyard and impressive interior galleries.

The **Çinili Camii** (Tiled Mosque; Çinili Camii Sokak; Map pp94-5) is the hidden jewel among Üsküdar's mosques. This little building is unprepossessing from the outside, but just wait until you see the interior, which is brilliant with İznik tiles, the bequest of Mahpeyker Kösem (1640), wife of Sultan Ahmet I (r 1603-17) and mother of sultans Murat IV (r 1623-40) and İbrahim (r 1640-48).

To find the Atik Valide Camii and Çinili Camii, walk up Hakimiyet-i Milliye Caddesi until you get to the traffic circle. Continue up Dr Fahri Atabey Caddesi for about 1km until you get to little Sarı Mehmet Sokak, on your left. From here you'll spot the minarets of Atik Valide Camii. To get to Çinili Camii from Atik Valide Camii, walk east along Çinili Camii Sokak for about 300m, after which it turns north and runs uphill. Çinili Camii is about 200m up the hill. All up it's about a 20-minute walk to the Çinili Camii from the main square.

Florence Nightingale Museum

The experience of visiting the Selimiye Kızları (Army Barracks), where this modest **museum** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0216-553 1009, fax 0216-310 7929; Nci Ordu Komutanlığı 1; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is housed, is even better than the museum itself. The barracks, built by Mahmut II in 1828 on the site of a barracks originally built by Selim III in 1799 and extended by Abdül Mecit I in 1842 and 1853, is the headquarters of the Turkish First Army, the largest division in the country. It's an extremely handsome building, with 2.5km of corridors, 300 rooms and 300 windows. During the Crimean War (1853-56) the barracks became a military hospital where the famous lady with the lamp and 38 nursing students worked. It was here that Nightingale put in practice the innovative nursing methods that history remembers her for. Although they seem commonsensical from a modern perspective, it is hard to overstate how radical they seemed at the time; it's really amazing to hear that before she arrived here, the mortality rate was 70% of patients but that by the time she left it had dropped to 5% (though others also contributed to this decrease).

The museum is on three levels in the north-west tower of the barracks. Downstairs there is a display charting the history of the First Army and concentrating on the Crimean War. On the two upstairs levels you see Nightingale's personal quarters, including her surgery room with original furnishings (including two lamps) and her living room, with great views across to Old Istanbul.

Unfortunately you need to fax a letter requesting to visit and nominating a time. Include a photocopy of your passport photo page. Do this 48 hours before you wish to visit and make sure you include your İstanbul phone number so that someone can respond to your request.

The museum is about halfway between Üsküdar and Kadıköy, near the fairy tale-like clock towers of the TC Marmara University. To get here, catch a dolmuş from in front of the ferry terminals in Üsküdar to Harem and ask locals to point you towards the Selimiye Kızları Harem Kapısı (the barracks' Harem Gate), a short walk away. A taxi from the ferry shouldn't cost more than €4.

Getting There & Away

If coming to Üsküdar from Sultanahmet, catch the ferry from Eminönü, which runs every 15 to 30 minutes (depending on the time of day) between 6.35am and 11pm.

Ferry services also operate between Beşiktaş (from beside the Deniz Müzesi) and Üsküdar. Ferries start at 6.30am and run every 15 to 30 minutes until 10.30pm. From nearby Kabataş, just south of Dolmabahçe Palace, ferries run to Üsküdar every 30 minutes from 7.15am until 9.15am and from 4.15pm until 8.15pm.

Slower buses and dolmuşes also run to and from Taksim Sq.

KADIKÖY

Although there's nothing to show of its historic beginnings and it has few headline sights, Kadıköy is well worth visiting if you find yourself with a spare afternoon. It has a youthful, modern vibe, which can provide some respite from conservative Old İstanbul over the water. There are shops galore a few steps south of the dock around the old-fashioned **Baylan Pastanesi** (Muvakkithane Caddesi 19) – everyone knows it – and English-language schools on every corner (need a job?). **Café Antre** (Miralay Nazım Sokak 10) roasts the best espresso beans in the city; head to Kadife Sokak for eateries and

bars. If you time your visit for Tuesday, you can scabble through the goodies on sale in the city's biggest street market, the **Salı Pazarı** (Tuesday Market).

To the north of Kadıköy is the neoclassical **Haydarpaşa Train Station** (Map pp94–5), resembling a German castle. In the early 20th century when Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany was trying to charm the sultan into economic and military cooperation, he presented the station as a small token of his respect. Today it's the subject of a controversial development plan to turn the station and its surrounds into a recreation and trade precinct, boasting seven high-rise towers. Ask a Kadıköy local for their opinion on the project and you'll be in for a long afternoon of çay drinking. Most ferries travelling between Kadıköy and Eminönü or Karaköy make a quick stop here.

Getting There & Away

If you're coming from Sultanahmet, hop on the ferry from Eminönü, which runs every 15 to 20 minutes (depending on the time of day) between 7.30am and 10.35pm.

From the ferry terminal at Karaköy (the Beyoğlu side of the Galata Bridge) services run from 6.10am every 10 to 30 minutes (depending on the time of day) until 11pm.

A ferry service also operates from Beşiktaş (catch it from beside the Deniz Müzesi), starting at 7.15am and running every half-hour until 10.45pm.

Buses and dolmuşes also run to and from Taksim Sq, but they take forever.

Bosphorus

Divan Yolu and İstiklal Caddesi are certainly always awash with people, but neither is the major thoroughfare in İstanbul. That honour goes to the mighty Bosphorus strait, which runs from the Sea of Marmara (Marmara Denizi) all the way to the Black Sea (Kara-deniz), 32km to the north.

The strait's name is taken from ancient mythology. *Bous* is cow in ancient Greek, and *poros* is crossing place, so 'Bosphorus' is the place where the cow crossed. The cow was Io, a young girl with whom Zeus, king of the gods, had an affair and got pregnant. When his wife Hera discovered his infidelity, Zeus tried to make up for it by turning his erstwhile lover into a cow. Hera, for good measure, provided a horsefly to sting Io on the rump and drive her across the strait. Proving that there

was no true justice on Olympus, Zeus managed to get off scot-free. Io's child, Cerossa, became the mother of the first founder of the city, Byzas.

In 1973 the Bosphorus Bridge, the fourth-longest suspension bridge in the world, was opened. For the first time there was a physical link across the straits from Europe to Asia. Traffic was so heavy over the new bridge that it paid for itself in less than a decade. Now there is a second bridge, the Fatih Bridge (named after Mehmet the Conqueror, Mehmet Fatih), just north of Rumeli Hisarı and a third is on the drawingboard.

Most visitors to İstanbul explore the Bosphorus suburbs by taking the ferry trip from Eminönü to Anadolu Kavağı.

EMİNÖNÜ TO BOSPHORUS BRIDGE

As you start your trip up the Bosphorus, watch out for the small island and tower of **Kız Kulesi** (p126), just off the Asian shore near Üsküdar. Just before the first stop at Beşiktaş, you'll pass the grandiose **Dolmabahçe Palace** (p121). Shortly after Beşiktaş, **Çırağan Sarayı**, (Map pp94–5) once home to Sultan Abdül Aziz and now the luxury Çırağan Palace Hotel Kempinski, looms up on the left. On the Asian shore opposite is a string of *yalı*. The word *yalı* derives from the Greek word for 'coast', and is used to describe the waterside wooden summer residences along the Bosphorus built by the Ottoman aristocracy and foreign ambassadors in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. All are now protected by the country's heritage laws.

On the European side, just before the majestic **Bosphorus Bridge** (Map pp94–5), is the pretty **Ortaköy Camii** (p122).

BOSPHORUS BRIDGE TO FATİH BRIDGE

Just after the bridge, on the Asian side, is the grand **Beylerbeyi Sarayı** (Beylerbeyi Palace; Map p93; ☎ 0216-321 9320; Abdullâh Ağa Caddesi, Beylerbeyi; admission €4.50; 🕒 9.30am–5pm Tue–Wed & Fri–Sun Apr–Oct, 9.30am–4pm Tue–Wed & Fri–Sun Nov–Mar). Look for its two whimsical marble bathing pavilions on the shore, one of which was for men, the other for the women of the harem. Every sultan needed a little place to get away to, and this 30-room palace was the place for Abdül Aziz (r 1861–76). These days it's musty but still impressive, particularly on a sunny afternoon when golden light floods the rooms. A compulsory guided tour whips you past

room after room filled with Bohemian crystal chandeliers, French (Sèvres) and Ming vases and sumptuous carpets.

Past the suburb of Çengelköy on the Asian side is the imposing **Kuleli Military School** (Map p93), built in 1860 and immortalised in İrfan Orga's wonderful memoir, *Portrait of a Turkish Family*. Look for the two witch hatlike towers.

Almost opposite Kuleli on the European shore is **Arnavutköy**, a suburb boasting a number of well-preserved frilly Ottoman-era wooden houses, including numerous *yalıs*. On the hill above it are buildings formerly occupied by the American College for Girls. Its most famous alumna was Halide Edib Adıvar, who wrote about it in her 1926 autobiography *Memoir of Halide Edib*.

Arnavutköy runs straight into the glamorous suburb of **Bebek**, famous for upmarket restaurants and waterside cafés. Its shops surround a small park and a mosque; to the east of these is the ferry dock, to the south the **Egyptian consulate** (Map p93), a gorgeous Art Nouveau minipalace built by the last *khedive* (viceroy during the Ottoman Empire) of Egypt, Abbas Hilmi II, who also later built Hıdiv Kasrı above Kanlıca on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. Above Bebek you'll notice the New England 19th-century-style architecture of the **Boğaziçi Üniversitesi** (Bosphorus University; Map p93).

Between Bebek and Kandilli headland the Bosphorus narrows. Kandilli means 'place of lamps', as lamps were lit here to warn ships of the particularly treacherous currents at the headland. Among the many *yalı* here is the small **Kırmızı Yalı** (The Red Yalı; Map p93), constructed in 1790 and one of the oldest still standing; a little further on is the long, white **Kıbrıslı Mustafa Emin Paşa Yalı** (Map p93). Next to the Kıbrıslı Yalı are the Büyük Göksu Deresi (Great Heavenly Stream) and Küçük Göksu Deresi (Small Heavenly Stream), two brooks that descend from the Asian hills into the Bosphorus. Between them is a flat, fertile delta, grassy and shady, which the Ottoman elite thought just perfect for picnics. Foreign residents, referring to the place as 'the Sweet Waters of Asia', would often join them.

If the weather was good, the sultan joined the party and did so in style. Sultan Abdül Mecit's version of a picnic blanket was the wedding cake-like **Küçüksu Kasrı** (Map p93; ☎ 0216-332 3303; Küçüksu Caddesi; admission €2.50; 🕒 9.30am–5pm

Tue-Wed & Fri-Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Tue-Wed & Fri-Sun Nov-Mar), an ornate lodge built in 1856-57. Earlier sultans had wooden kiosks here, but architect Nikoğos Balyan designed a rococo gem in marble for his monarch.

Just before the **Fatih Bridge** (Map p93) are the majestic structures of Rumeli Hisari, the Fortress of Europe, and the low towers peeping over trees of the Anadolu Hisari, the Fortress of Asia.

Mehmet the Conqueror had **Rumeli Hisari** (Map p93; ☎ 0212-263 5305; Yahya Kemal Caddesi 42; admission €2.50; ☎ 9am-4pm Thu-Tue) built in a mere four months during 1452, in preparation for his planned siege of Byzantine Constantinople. For its location he chose the narrowest point of the Bosphorus, opposite Anadolu Hisari, which had been built by Sultan Beyazıt I in 1391. By doing so he was able to control all traffic on the strait, so cutting off the city from resupply by sea and brilliantly assisting his invasion strategy.

The mighty fortress's useful military life lasted less than one year. After the conquest of Constantinople, it was used as a glorified Bosphorus tollbooth for a while, then as a barracks, later as a prison, and finally as an open-air theatre hosting concerts every summer.

Within Rumeli Hisari's walls are parklike grounds, an open-air theatre and the minaret of a ruined mosque. Steep stairs (with no barriers, so beware!) lead up to the ramparts and towers; the views of the Bosphorus from here are magnificent. Just next to the fortress is a clutch of cafés and restaurants. Atmospheric **Sade Kahve** (☎ 0212-358 2324; Yahya Kemal Caddesi 36) is best.

Although it's not open as a museum, visitors are free to wander about **Anadolu Hisari's** ruined walls.

Past Anadolu Hisari (almost directly under the Fatih Bridge) is the recently renovated **Köprülü Amcade Hüseyin Paşa Yalı** (Map p93) built right on the water in 1698 and the oldest *yalı* on the Bosphorus.

FATİH BRIDGE TO ANADOLU KAVAĞI

Past the bridge, still on the Asian side, is the charming suburb of **Kanlıca**, famous for its rich and delicious yogurt. You can sample it in the **Asırlık Kanlıca Yoğurdu** (İskele Meydanı, Kanlıca; yogurt with honey €1.75, çay €1) on the shady waterfront square. The unprepossessing Gâzi İskender Paşa Camii in the square dates from 1560 and was designed by Sinan.

One of İstanbul's most famous seafood restaurants, **Körfez** (☎ 0216-413 4314; Körfez Caddesi 78, Kanlıca; mains €16-44; ☎ 11am-4pm Tue-Sun, 6pm-midnight daily), is on Kanlıca's outskirts, almost directly under the bridge. Just near Körfez is the late-19th-century **Ethem Pertev Yalı**, with its boathouse and ornate wooden decoration.

High on a promontory above Kanlıca is **Hıdiv Kasrı** (Khedive's Villa; Map p93; ☎ 0216-258 9453; Hıdiv Yolu 32, Kanlıca; admission free, parking €1.50; ☎ 8am-11pm), a grand Art Nouveau villa built by the last *khedive* of Egypt as a summer residence for use during his family's annual visits to İstanbul. Its tower stands high above the foliage.

Restored after decades of neglect, Hıdiv Kasrı now functions as a restaurant and garden café. The villa is a gem and the extensive and lovely garden is superb. It's a few minutes by taxi (€2.50) uphill from Kanlıca or a 20-minute walk. To walk, go north from Kanlıca's main square and mosque and turn right at the first street (Kafadar Sokak), which winds up towards the villa car park. Turn left at Dere Sokak and shortly you'll come to a fork in the road. Take the left fork and walk up past Kanlıca Hekimler Sitesi on the corner. You'll soon see the villa's car park and extensive wooded garden.

On the opposite shore is the wealthy suburb of **Emirgan**. In late April to early May, Emirgan Park, just above the town, is decked out in tulips. North of Emirgan, is the small yacht-lined cove of **İstinye**.

Just north of İstinye, **Yeniköy** is on a point jutting out from the European shore. It was first settled in classical times and later became a favourite summer resort, as indicated by the lavish 19th-century Ottoman *yalı* of the one-time grand vizier, **Sait Halim Paşa**. Look for its two small stone lions on the quay. On the opposite shore is the suburb of **Paşabağçe**, once famous for its glassware factory; and a bit further on is the fishing suburb of **Beykoz**, which has a graceful ablutions fountain dating from 1746 near the village square, as well as several fish restaurants.

Originally called Therapeia for its healthy climate, the little cove of **Tarabya** on the European shore has been a favourite summer watering place for İstanbul's well-to-do for centuries, although contemporary development has sullied some of its charm.

North of the village are some of the old summer embassies of foreign powers. When

the heat and fear of disease increased in the warm months, foreign ambassadors and their staff would retire to palatial residences, complete with lush gardens, on this shore. Such residences extended north to the village of **Büyükdere**, notable for its churches, summer embassies and the **Sadberk Hanım Müzesi** (Map p93; ☎ 0212-242 3813; www.sadberkhanimmuzesi.org.tr; Büyükdere Caddesi 27-9, Sarıyer; admission €3; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Tue). Named after the wife of the late Mr Vehbi Koç, founder of Turkey's foremost commercial empire in 1926, the museum, which occupies two restored *yalı*, contains her private collection of Anatolian antiques and Ottoman heirlooms.

Sarıyer, the next suburb up from Büyükdere on the European shore, is noted for its fish restaurants. Turn right as you leave the ferry dock, staying as close to the shore as possible, and you will pass the seabus terminal and several fish restaurants before coming to the Tarihi Balıkçılar Çarşısı, the historic fish market.

The ferry's second-last stop is at **Rumeli Kavağı**, a sleepy place that gets most of its excitement from the arrival and departure of the ferry. There's a small public beach named Altunkum nearby, with a small restaurant serving mezes and beer, but not much else. To the south is the shrine of the Muslim saint Telli Baba, reputed to be able to find suitable husbands for young women who pray there.

Anadolu Kavağı is where the state-run Bosphorus excursion ferry finishes its journey. Surrounded by countryside, it's a pleasant spot in which to wander and have a seafood lunch. Unfortunately restaurant touts can be a bit pushy. It's best to make your choice after inspecting the freshness of the fish; the best restaurants overlook the water by the ferry dock; cheaper ones are in the backstreets. Perched above the village are the ruins of **Anadolu Kavağı Kalesi**, a medieval castle that originally had eight massive towers in its walls. First built by the Byzantines, it was restored and reinforced by the Genoese in 1350, and later by the Ottomans. It will take you 30 to 50 minutes to walk up to the fortress from the town. Alternatively, taxis wait near the fountain in the town square just east of the ferry dock; they charge €5.75 for the return trip with 30 minutes' waiting time. Whichever way you get there, it's worth the effort for the spectacular Black Sea views. Unfortunately, the site is strewn with litter discarded by picnicking groups.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are numerous ways to explore the Bosphorus. Most people take the public excursion boat (below), which allows a lovely, relaxing day-trip with a stop for fish lunch up in a pleasant village by the Black Sea (you can walk up to a castle for views over the Bosphorus heads and the Black Sea). You could also take this boat most of the way north up the Bosphorus, then make your way back down the Bosphorus by bus and even local ferry, stopping for sightseeing along the way – see Buses and Public Ferries (p132). This is a great option, too, but it can be marred by the ubiquitous traffic jams along the coastal roads, especially after 3pm. Don't let this put you off, just steel yourself. You can choose between coming back along the European or Asian sides of the Bosphorus, or even a bit of both: both options are gorgeous, but the European side has more frequent public transport and more sights; the Asian side is quieter, with gorgeous village-like suburbs along its length but more hassle to get around.

The third option is the private excursions (p132).

Public Excursion Boats

The most popular way to explore the Bosphorus is by ferry. Most day-trippers take the state-run **Boğaziçi Özel Gezi Seferleri** (Bosphorus Special Touristic Excursions; one way €2, return €4; ☎ 10.35am year-round & noon & 1.35pm Jun-Oct) ferry up its entire length. These depart from the Boğaz İskelesi dock at Eminönü (Map pp96-7) and stop at Beşiktaş, Kanlıca, Yeniköy, Sarıyer, Rumeli Kavağı and Anadolu Kavağı (the turnaround point). The journey takes 90 minutes each way with a three-hour stop for lunch and exploration of Anadolu Kavağı. Boats leave Anadolu Kavağı for the return journey at 3pm, 4.15pm and 5pm (June to October), arriving back in Eminönü at 4.30pm, 5.30pm and 6.30pm respectively. On summer weekends the last ferry leaves Anadolu Kavağı at 7pm, not 5pm. It is not possible to get on and off the ferry at stops along the way using the same ticket.

The boats fill up early in summer, especially over weekends, so buy your ticket and walk aboard at least 45 minutes prior to departure to get a seat outside or next to a window. During the trip, waiters will offer you fresh orange juice (€1.75), tea and other drinks.

Buses & Public Ferries

You can also take the Boğaziçi Özel Gezi Seferleri ferry from Eminönü up the Bosphorus and travel back by bus along the European or Asian side (or a bit of both if you want to be creative and determined).

There is also a passenger ferry service between Sarıyer and Anadolu Kavağı with 15 ferries a day from 7.15am to 11pm; seven of them stop at Rumeli Kavağı on the way.

If you want to travel back by bus along the European side, consider taking the Boğaziçi ferry as far as Sarıyer, then hopping on a southward bound bus and stopping at Rumeli Hisarı for sightseeing and lunch and perhaps at Ortaköy, Çırağan Sarayı or Dolmabahçe Palace. The ferry arrives at Sarıyer at 11.45am and also at 2.45pm, between June and October. From Sarıyer, bus 25E makes the slow trip back to Eminönü, bus 40 to Taksim Sq and bus 40B to Beşiktaş. Dolmuşes also ply these routes.

If you want to travel back by bus along the Asian side, you'll need more fortitude, but it's still doable. Take the ferry all the way to Anadolu Kavağı, then consider stopping at Hıdiv Kasrı or Körfez Restaurant for lunch, or Küçükü Kasrı or Beylerbeyi Sarayı on your way back to Üsküdar. Bus No 15A, which leaves from the square in front of the Anadolu Kavağı ferry terminal, will take you along the coast as far as Hıdiv Kasrı or the Körfez Restaurant. From Hıdiv Kasrı or Körfez you can

catch bus No 15 all the way to Üsküdar, from where you can catch a ferry to Eminönü or Beşiktaş, or you could even take a taxi across the Fatih Bridge to Rumeli Hisarı, and continue your journey along the European side.

From Kanlıca it's also possible to catch a passenger ferry back towards town. These stop at Anadolu Hisarı, Kandilli, Bebek and Arnavutköy. Departures from Kanlıca are generally at 8.40am, 10.25am, 1.10pm, 2.40pm, 4.10pm, 5.40pm and 7.20pm. The trip to Arnavutköy takes 30 minutes.

Private Excursion Boats

These excursion boats aren't as good as the public excursion boat trip, as they only take you as far as Rumeli Hisarı (without stopping), although you do travel closer to the shoreline. The whole trip takes about three hours: one hour of travel each way and an hour at Rumeli Hisarı, which is just long enough to have lunch or to see the castle, but certainly not long enough to do both.

Touts are always found selling tickets for these trips around the Eminönü docks for €14 each, but try bargaining. Tours are on smaller boats (60 to 100 people), each with a small sun deck. These boats leave from beside the İstanbul Deniz Otobüsleri dock (Map pp96-7) every 1½ to two hours from 11am, with the last one at 8pm from June to September (4pm at other times). Note that departure times change, as boats tend to leave when they fill up.

BOSPHORUS NIGHT CRUISES

One of the most enjoyable, and certainly most romantic, night-time activities in İstanbul is to take a Bosphorus ferry. It doesn't really matter where – as long as you don't end up on the southern coast of the Sea of Marmara or on the Princes' Islands because you will find it difficult getting back again. Enjoy the view back to the Old City, the twinkling lights, the fishing boats bobbing on the waves and the powerful searchlights of the ferries sweeping the sea lanes.

Perhaps the best ferry to catch for this purpose is the one from Karaköy (just over the Galata Bridge from Eminönü) to **Kadıköy**. Just go to Karaköy, buy two tokens (for the voyages out and back) and walk on board. When you reach Kadıköy you could head into the backstreets and grab a bite to eat (p128). Return ferries leave on the hour and half hour, with the last ferry leaving Kadıköy (or the nearby Haydarpaşa stop) for Karaköy at midnight; make sure you confirm this at the ticket booth when you first arrive. You could also catch the Eminönü-Karaköy ferry, but the last service returns from Kadıköy at 8.40pm.

A shorter ride is the one from Eminönü to **Üsküdar**. When you alight in Üsküdar, you could have a delicious feed at Kanaat Lokantası (p126), or turn right and walk around the coast to the *çay bahçesi* (tea gardens) near the Şemsi Paşa Camii. After a tea or two, continue on the popular waterside promenade past the famous Kız Kulesi (see p126) – a gorgeous walk on a summer's evening. Return ferries leave every half hour, with the last ferry leaving Üsküdar at 11pm. Again, make sure you confirm this when you first arrive.

HAMAMS

A visit to a *hamam* is a quintessential Turkish experience, and İstanbul's *hamams* are superb. If you're only going to visit one or two while in town, we suggest you choose the 'Big Two' – Cağaloğlu and Çemberlitaş. While these touristy *hamams* are pricey, they're worth it for the gorgeous historic surrounds, their squeaky-clean maintenance and as most clientele will be having their first *hamam* experience, you won't feel out of place. Allow at least an hour. For more information about bath etiquette see the boxed text, p651.

Built over three centuries ago, **Cağaloğlu Hamamı** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-522 2424; Yerebatan Caddesi 34; bath & massage €17, bath only €10; ♿ 7am-10pm men, 8am-8pm women) is one of the city's most beautiful *hamams*. The surroundings are so impressive they've featured in everything from soap ads to an Indiana Jones film. Separate baths each have a large *camekan* (reception area) with private, lockable cubicles where it's possible to have a nap or a tea at the end of your bath. There's also an inviting bar-café. The 'Oriental Luxury Service' costs €30 and includes bath, massage and exfoliation, but you're probably just as well off with the 'Complete' service (€20). A tip is appreciated.

The **Çemberlitaş Hamamı** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-522 7974; Vezir Hanı Caddesi 8, Çemberlitaş; bath & massage €20, bath only €13.50; ♿ 6am-midnight) was designed by Sinan in 1584. Like Cağaloğlu, it's a double *hamam* (separate baths for men and women) and is similarly popular with tourists. The splendid *camekan* is unfortunately for men only. Women must put up with a utilitarian corridor filled with lockers and benches. This makes Cağaloğlu a better bet for women, unless you fancy the full works, including a 30-minute oil massage (€27), or a clay facial (€5). Tips are supposedly included in the price and there's a 20% discount for ISIC holders.

It may be old (c 1475 in fact), run down and a bit grubby, but the masseuses at the local **Gedikpaşa Hamamı** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0212-517 8956; Hamam Caddesi 65-7, Gedikpaşa; bath & massage €15, bath only €5.50; ♿ 9am-midnight), a short walk from Sultanahmet, know what they're doing.

It's hard to recommend the **Tarihi Galatasaray Hamamı** (Historic Galatasaray Turkish Bath; Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-244 1412; Turnacıbaşı Sokak 24, Çukurcuma; bath & massage €31, bath only €25; ♿ 6am-10pm men, 8am-8pm women), as it's outrageously overpriced. However, if you're over this side of town, this is one of İstanbul's best *hamams*. It's famous

for having one of the hottest *hararets* in town (that sounds rude but we mean it literally). Note that staff have a reputation for hassling for tips, and the women's section is mostly a 1960s add-on – women would definitely be better off going elsewhere.

WALKING TOUR

Divan Yolu, the main thoroughfare of the old city, was laid out by Roman engineers to connect the city with Roman roads heading west. This tour will have you following in their footsteps.

Start your walk at the **Milion (1)**, at the south side of the park near the Basilica Cistern. This is the marble milestone from which all distances in Byzantium were measured. The tower beside it was once part of the Aqueduct of Valens (p124), delivering water to the Basilica Cistern. Head west along Divan Yolu to the little **Firuz Ağa Camii (2)** built in 1491 during the reign of Beyazıt II (r 1481-1512). Just behind it are the ruins of the 5th-century **Palace of Antiochus (3)**. Continue along Divan Yolu and turn left into İmran Öktem Caddesi to find the 4th-century **Binbirdirek Cistern (4)**; p108). Back on Divan Yolu, you'll see an impressive enclosure at the corner of Babiali Caddesi, which is a cemetery housing the **tombs (5)** of the Ottoman high and mighty.

Exit the cemetery and cross the road to find the tiny stone **Köprülü library (6)** built by the Köprülü family in 1661. Stroll a bit further along Divan Yolu and into the Çemberlitaş district where Divan Yolu changes name to Yeniçeriler Caddesi. On the left are some more buildings from the Köprülü *külliyesi*. The **tomb (7)** is that of Köprülü Mehmet Paşa (1575-1661), and the octagonal mosque on the corner was a lecture and study room. Across the street, that strange building with a row of street-front shops is actually an ancient Turkish bathhouse, the **Çemberlitaş Hamamı (8)**; left).

The column, under renovation at the time of writing, rising up from the pigeon-packed plaza is, surprisingly, one of İstanbul's most ancient and revered monuments. The **Çemberlitaş (9)**, the Banded Stone or Burnt Column, was erected by Constantine in 330 to celebrate the dedication of Constantinople as capital of the Roman Empire. A bit further on is the **Atik Ali Camii (10)**, built in 1496 by a eunuch and grand vizier of Beyazıt II. Beyond Atik Ali Camii on the right (north) side is the

Koca Sinan Paşa Medresesi (11), resting place of Grand Vizier Koca Sinan Paşa. After you've seen the tomb here, head past the cemetery and to the right, where you'll find the quiet gardens of the **İlesam Lokalı (12)**; p148), a great place to enjoy a tea-break and nargileh.

Continue along Yeniceriler Caddesi until you see the **Beyazıt Camii (13)**; p115). Its *medrese* houses the **Museum of Turkish Calligraphic Art (14)**; Türk Vakıf Hat Sanatları Müzesi; ☎ 0212-527 5851; Hürriyet Meydanı, Beyazıt; admission €2; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sat), with a somewhat neglected collection. After exiting the mosque, head towards the right of the grandiose main entrance of İstanbul University. Following the university's walls along Fuat Paşa Caddesi, turn left up Prof Sıddık Sami Onar Caddesi and you will come to one of the most majestic of all Ottoman mosques

WALK FACTS

Start Milion, near Basilica Cistern

Finish Süleymaniye Camii

Distance 1.5km

Duration two hours

and the last stop on this tour, the **Süleymaniye Camii (15)**; p116). Reward your efforts with a tea at Lale Bahçesi (p148) or a quick, tasty bite to eat at Meshur Kuru Fasulyeci (p143).

İSTANBUL FOR CHILDREN

Children of all ages will enjoy the sensational **Rahmi M Koç Müzesi (p123)**; nearby **Miniaturk (p123)** may amuse them for an hour or two. The spooky **Basilica Cistern (p108)**, with its obese fish, is always a hit, as is the ferry trip down the Bosphorus, particularly if it's combined with a visit to the fortress of **Rumeli Hisarı (p130)** – beware of the steep stairs here, which have no barriers. On **Heybeliada (p162)**, one of the Princes' Islands, you can hire bikes or circle the island in a *fatyon* (horse-drawn carriage). The Mehter band playing at the **Askeri Müzesi (p121)** is always a winner, too.

If you're staying in Sultanahmet, there are two teeny playgrounds near the Cankurtaran train station, and a bigger, busier one in Kadırga park close by. If you're staying in Beyoğlu, the limited options are at least better quality: there's one in Tophane, a better one at Cihangir Park (paid for by locals) and one

at the Fındıklı station of the tramline, right by the water's edge – very scenic!

If you need to resort to bribery to ensure good behaviour, there's a toyshop area in Eminönü. The biggest and best shop here is **Ekincioglu Toys & Gifts (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-522 6220; Kalçın Sokak 5; Eminönü; ☎ 9am-7pm)**. There's a small shop in Beyoğlu too, **hyigün Oyuncak (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-243 8910; İstiklal Caddesi 415; ☎ 9am-9pm)**.

TOURS

City Tours

Adventure Tours (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-520 8720; www.adventuretours.com.tr; Şeftali Sokak 12, Sultanahmet) One of the few agents in town offering a full-day beach tour to the Black Sea (€65), which might be just what you need when it's stinking hot in İstanbul.

City Sightseeing bus (☎ 0212-458 1800; one-day ticket adult/student/child 5 & over/child under 5 €18/12/10/free) This is the typical naff hop-on-hop-off bus service. Ticket booths are opposite Aya Sofya and in Taksim Sq or you can purchase tickets on the bus. The full circuit takes 90 minutes or you can get on and off the bus at any of the 63 stops around town, but buses only run a few times a day. Departure times change regularly so double check. Expect traffic congestion on the Beyoğlu section.

Fez Travel (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-516 9024; www.feztravel.com; Akbiyik Caddesi 15, Sultanahmet, İstanbul) Backpacker tours around Turkey, including Gallipoli tours. Also operates the Fez Bus; see the boxed text, p680.

Hassle Free Tours (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-458-9500; www.hasslefreeout.com; Akbiyik Caddesi 10, Sultanahmet; tours €60) Runs tours to Gallipoli, including an overnight stay at Anzac House in Çanakkale (p193), before visiting the ruins at Troy and either travelling on to Selçuk or back to İstanbul.

İstanbul Insolite (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-531 4811; www.istanbulguide.net/insolite; Sadrazam Ali Paşa Caddesi 26, Fener; tours €40-75) This small home-based agency in Fener runs a variety of full- and half-day off-beat tours from the intriguing 'superstitious İstanbul', and a 'caravanserais' tour, to a walk through Fener and Balat. English, German and French are spoken.

İstanbul Food Workshop (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-534 4788; www.istanbulfoodworkshop.com; Yıldırım Caddesi 111, Fener) This cookery school also runs walking tours for foodies, divulging the city's best eateries, spice merchants and *pastanes* (patisseries).

Kirkit Voyage (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-518 2282; www.kirkit.com; Amiral Tafdil Sokak 12, Sultanahmet; tours €30-75) This small agency specialises in small-group walking tours of the must-see sights as well as 'İstanbul the Unusual Way'. It's one of the only companies to offer an 'Asian İstanbul and its Markets' tour. English and French are spoken. Kirkit also organises overnight Gallipoli and Troy tours.

Les Arts Turcs (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-511 2296; www.lesartsturcs.org; İncilif Çavuş Sokak 37/3, Sultanahmet; tours & lessons €25-50; ☎ 9am-11pm) If you've ever wanted to learn *ebru* (paper marbling), belly dance like a gypsy or become a calligrapher, Les Arts Turcs can make it happen. This isn't a standard tour operator, it's a collective of artists, writers and historians who come and go from a welcoming studio in Sultanahmet. Some of the courses and tours on offer include seeing the whirling dervishes at Fatih Tekke, private Turkish lessons (€22 per hour), and an 'İstanbul Modern Art' tour.

Plan Tours (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-234 7777; www.plan.tours.com; information booth opposite Aya Sofya, Sultanahmet; tours €40-120) Offers a standard range of professionally run half- and full-day tours of the city, the Bosphorus, the Princes' Islands and long day trips to Troy & Gallipoli. There's a 30% discount for children aged from two to seven years.

Senkron Tours (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-638 8340; www.senkrontours.com; Arasta Caddesi 51, Sultanahmet; tours €20-45) Aimed squarely at budget travellers, Senkron offers well-priced tours of İstanbul including a combined Golden Horn and the Bosphorus boat trip.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

During the warmer months İstanbul is buzzing with arts- and music-festivals events, giving the visitor plenty of options when it comes to entertainment. Most of the big-name arts festivals are organised by the **İstanbul Foundation for Culture & Arts (☎ 0212-334 0700; www.istfest.org)**. Tickets to most events are available from Biletix (see p150). Headline events include the following:

APRIL & MAY

International İstanbul Film Festival (www.iksv.org)

International İstanbul Theatre Festival (www.iksv.org) Every two years.

JUNE & JULY

Efes Pilsen One Love (www.pozitif-ist.com)

International İstanbul Jazz Festival (www.iksv.org)

International İstanbul Music Festival (www.iksv.org)

SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER

Akbank Jazz Festival (www.akbankcaz.com)

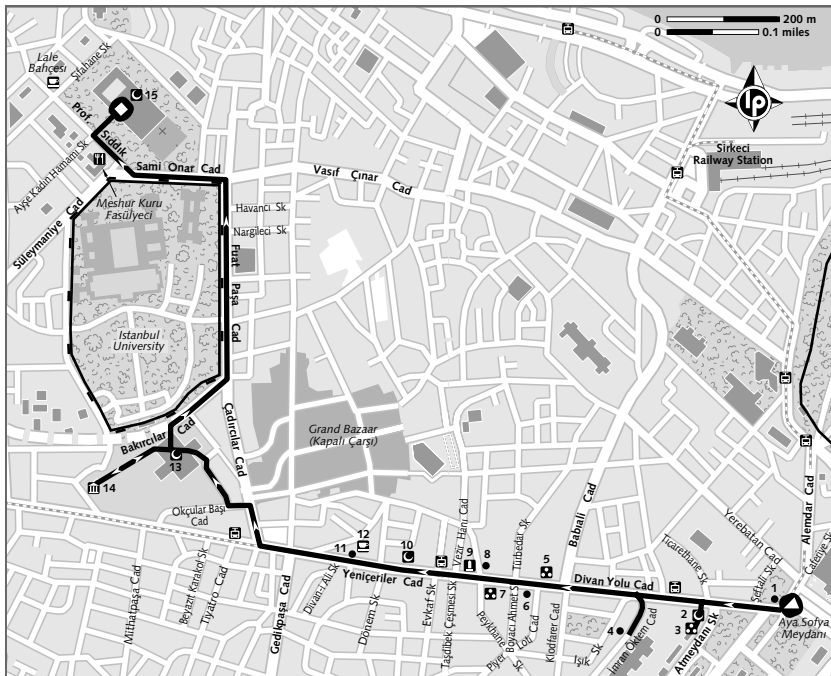
Efes Pilsen Blues Festival (www.pozitif-ist.com)

Filmekimi Autumn Film Festival (www.iksv.org)

International İstanbul Biennial (www.iksv.org) Every two years.

Minifest, the Children's Festival (www.iksv.org)

Rock'n Coke (www.rockncoke.com)



SLEEPING

Every accommodation style is available in İstanbul. You can live like a sultan in a world-class luxury hotel, doss in a friendly hostel dorm, or relax in a stylish boutique establishment.

Hotels reviewed here have rooms with private bathroom and include breakfast, usually of the Turkish variety, in the room price. Exceptions are noted in the reviews. All prices given are for high season and include 18% value-added tax (*katma değer vergisi*, KDV). During low season (October to April, but not around Christmas or Easter) you should be able to negotiate a discount of at least 20% on the price. Before you confirm a booking, ask if the hotel will give you a discount for cash payment (usually 10% but can be higher), whether a pick-up from the airport is included (it often is if you stay more than three nights) and whether there are discounts for extended stays. Book ahead from May to September.

For more accommodation reviews by Lonely Planet authors for İstanbul, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com.

Sultanahmet & Around

The Sultan Ahmet Camii (the Blue Mosque), gives its name to the quarter surrounding it. This is the heart of Old İstanbul and the city's premier sightseeing area, so the hotels here, and in the adjoining neighbourhoods to the east (Cankurtaran), west (Küçük Aya Sofya) and north (Binbirdirek and Çemberlitaş) are supremely convenient. The area's only drawbacks are the number of carpet touts around, the lack of decent places to eat, and that it's a ghost town at night (no quality nightlife).

BUDGET

Mavi Guesthouse (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-517 7287; www.maviquesthouse.com; Kutlugün Sokak 3, Sultanahmet; dm €7-11, s €20, d €24-28; 📍) Teeny Mavi is a perennial favourite. Don't come for partying, but for night-long backgammon battles in the pint-sized kilim-clad lounge. Rooms are basic but clean enough – get one facing the street – and all share so-so toilets. There's also a communal kitchen. You'll make friends aplenty if you stay on the rooftop bunk beds – almost sleeping on your neighbour is guaranteed to kick-start a conversation! An added bonus is the views: Aya Sofya and a bird's-eye view of the Great Byzantine Palace excavations. You'd pay a packet for this elsewhere!

İstanbul Hostel (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-516 9380; www.istanbulhostel.net; Kutlugün Sokak 35, Sultanahmet; dm/d €10/30; 📍 📍) This well-appointed hostel has some of the cheapest and cleanest facilities in town. Six to nine-bed dorms are a little cramped but cheery. There are only two doubles, rooms 6 and 7 – avoid damp-smelling room 7. All rooms share well-kept bathrooms. There's a cellar bar, a leafy courtyard, and a terrace with lovely views – snuggle into a comfy sofa and enjoy. On the minus side, the management gets mixed reviews.

Bahaus Guesthouse (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-638 6534; www.travelistanbul.com; Bayramfırı Sokak 11-13, Cankurtaran; dm €10-12, s €25, d €32-40; 📍 📍) Laid-back, fun and very friendly, the Bahaus is a great choice. Assets include the lovely rooftop terrace; the inviting lounge (inspired wall colour choice fellas!); and the rooftop BBQs for €6, with a pint of beer thrown in (the bar doesn't gather dust at Bahaus). The rooms themselves are fine – not immaculate, but well maintained – but avoid the ones in the bunkerlike basement.

Çoşkun Pension (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-526 9854; www.coskunpension.com; Soğukçeşme Sokak 40, Sultanahmet; s/d €25/35; 📍 📍) This laid-back, friendly option is a cosy guesthouse gripping Topkapı Palace's walls. Rooms are teeny but homely. This was once the home of the Çoşkun family (the other brothers own shops downstairs and we dare you not to hang out with these lads). Beware the treacherous stairs you'll have to scale to reach the rooftop terrace with its ceiling of grape-vine leaves in summer. The pension is a favourite with Japanese travellers.

Stone Hotel & Cafe (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-517 6331; www.stonehotel.net; Şehit Mehmet Paşa Yokuşu 34, Binbirdirek; dm/s/d €10/30/40; 📍) An excellent choice, the Stone Hotel has an eight-bed dorm with proper mattresses and excellent, cheery doubles (rooms 401 and 402 have terrific views). There's a small rooftop terrace overlooking the Sea of Marmara and Sokullu Mehmet Paşa Mosque (er...yes, brace yourself for the early morning call to prayer...). Challenge the locals to a game of *tavla* (backgammon) and a puff-a-thon with a nargileh in the shade-dappled stone-walled courtyard out the back.

Side Hotel & Pension (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-517 2282; www.sidehotel.com; Utangaç Sokak 20, Sultanahmet; pension s/d €35/45, hotel s/d €45/60, apt €60-80; 📍 📍) Choose Side for quality rooms, squeaky-clean bathrooms (some with en suite, some shared) and management who know their stuff. The

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Turkuaz Guest House (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0212-518 1897; www.hotelturkuaz.com; Cinci Meydanı Sokak 36, Kadırga, Kumkapı; s/d €35/45) Not for the faint-hearted nor for lovers-of-less, this extravagant Ottoman mansion has barely been touched since it was built in the 1850s. The communal spaces are simply mind-blowing: a frenzied pastiche of marble, stained-glass and İznik tiles topped by ornate wooden ceilings heaving with extravagant chandeliers. It's easy to see why the Turkuaz has often been used for film sets. The rooms themselves are over the top as well, but are well kept with good, roomy bathrooms. When you stay in the Sultan's room (€80) you really feel the part. Turkuaz is 15-minutes' walk from Sultanahmet by the Sea of Marmara, in an original, non-touristy neighbourhood of tumbledown houses. Hooray for this delightful dash of eccentricity.

hotel's rooms are top-notch and some have private balconies: rooms 15 and 16 are our fave picks. Next door, the pension's rooms are pleasant, too, but avoid those at the back. The Side has a fabulous terrace (ditto the views), a welcoming hang-out spot with sofas. The fully equipped but dark apartments sleep one to six people.

Orient International Hostel (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-518 0789; www.orienthostel.com; Akbiyık Caddesi 13, Cankurtaran; dm €10-11, r €45-65; 📍 📍) Always packed, no-frills Orient is backpacker central. The basement bar draws crowds ogling the belly dancer practising her moves into the wee hours. The rooftop restaurant-bar has terrific views and very friendly staff – Happy Hour (5pm to 8pm daily) here is a must. The breakfasts at the Orient get the thumbs up, too (but eat your other meals elsewhere). The simply furnished rooms are generally fine, but housekeeping can be lax at times and the carpets in the dorms (four and eight-bed) are simply appalling. Bathrooms pass the sniff test – just. A good option if you want to be in the heart of the action and you don't mind less than perfect service.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Sultan's Inn (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-638 2562; www.sultansinn.com; Mustafa Paşa Sokak 50, Küçük Aya Sofya; s/d €45/60; 📍 📍 📍) Tucked in a pleasant

neighbourhood away from the hullabaloo of Sultanahmet, but still within walking distance to all the sights, the Sultan's Inn is an excellent choice. The biggest drawcard here is the simply stunning 360-degree views from the rooftop terrace. The rooms are a fairly tight squeeze but pleasantly decorated with four-poster beds, wooden furniture and ochre feature walls.

Hotel Ararat (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-516 0411; www.ararathotel.com; Torun Sokak 3, Sultanahmet; r €65-75; 📍 📍) The Ararat is tiny but its charming host and cosy rooftop terrace-bar in the shadow of the Blue Mosque make it a popular choice. Dark wooden floors, Byzantine-inspired artwork and a clever use of space-enhancing mirrors are the decorative hallmarks. The trick here is to pick the right room – request number 6, 12 or 14 for space and killer views.

Naz Wooden House Inn (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-516 7130; www.nazwoodenhouseinn.com; Akbiyık Değirmeni Sokak 7, Cankurtaran; s €70-90, d €70-110; 📍 📍) This delightful gem, in a lovely neighbourhood of tumbledown wooden houses, offers traditional hospitality and style, complete with doilies! Our choice is Room 7 overlooking the Sea of Marmara, but you can enjoy the same view from the rooftop terrace. The one downside to Naz is the rail line out back – trains tootle past from 7am to 11pm.

Kybele Hotel (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-511 7766; www.kybelehotel.com; Yerebatan Caddesi 35, Sultanahmet; s €60-70, d €80-100; 📍 📍) No you haven't walked into a lamp store, but the lobby of the charming Kybele Hotel. Nearly every ceiling in this loopy gem is studded with hanging lamps and public rooms are jam-packed with curios and antique furniture. The rooms themselves are simple, comfortable and roomy with kilims on the floors. There's no roof terrace but a lovely courtyard compensates.

Hotel Nomade (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-513 8172; www.hotelnomade.com; Ticarethane Sokak 15, Sultanahmet; s/d €70/85; 📍 📍) Cosy and contemporary, Nomade is a well-priced boutique option for lovers of style. The checked-floor terrace up top has tree-top views. Propped at the chunky timber bar up here is obviously the place to be for an afternoon martini. The rooms themselves are a tight squeeze and minimalist, and we must confess, a tad disappointing compared with the cool style of the communal spaces.

Sarı Konak Oteli (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-638 6258; www.sarikonak.com; Mimar Mehmet Ağa Caddesi 42-46, Cankurtaran; r €89; 📍 📍) With its Ottoman style and

not a hair out of place, Sarı Konak Oteli also boasts a lovely stone-walled courtyard, and a terrace with excellent views ringed by white sofa lounges. What better place to watch the sunset? The deluxe rooms are the best value: 203 with its bay window stuffed with a comfy couch is our favourite. The service is both friendly and unflappable.

Hotel Empress Zoe (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-518 2504; www.emzoe.com; Adliye Sokak 10, Cankurtaran; s/d budget €50/60; s/d standard €70/95; 🏠) Empress Zoe is an excellent choice. Immaculate and supremely tasteful rooms in adjoining buildings share a gorgeous pebbled garden and a wisteria-bedecked terrace offering terrific views. The suites are delightful, especially the 'deluxe garden suite', but the 'special double with terrace' is probably best value for money. If there's a downside to Zoe it's that some of the rooms in the original building are a tight squeeze. Book well ahead.

Hotel Turkoman (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-516 2956; www.turkomanhotel.com; Asmalı Çeşme Sokak 2, Sultanahmet; s/d €79/99; 🏠 🏠) You'll feel as if you've booked into a private club when you walk into the Turkoman. In a fantastic position up the hill a few steps off the Hippodrome, this renovated 19th-century building features spacious rooms that are simply but tastefully decorated with kilims, reproduction antique furniture and brass beds. Ask for room 4A, which has a balcony and Blue Mosque view. The rooftop terrace has knock-out views of the Princes' Islands. This is the superb setting for the buffet breakfast, but rise early to get the best seats at the front of the terrace.

Hotel Arcadia (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-516 9696; www.hotelarcadiaistanbul.com; İmran Öktem Caddesi 1, Sultanahmet; s/d €80/100; 🏠 🏠) The piped Michael Bolton music in the foyer was disconcerting, but all was forgiven when we were shown the rooftop café-restaurant with its outstanding views of the Blue Mosque, Aya Sofya, Topkapı Palace and the Sea of Marmara – the best view from any hotel in Sultanahmet. The room décor is chintzy, but appointments are four-star standard. Book rooms 702 to 706 for a view.

TOP END

Ayasofya Pansiyonları & Konuk Evi (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-513 3660; www.ayasofyapansiyonlari.com; Soğukçeşme Sokak, Sultanahmet; s/d €80/110; 🏠 🏠) If you're keen to play out Ottoman fantasies during your stay, choose a room in one of the nine lovingly

restored wooden houses lining Topkapı Palace's outer wall (or at Konuk Evi, a stunning mansion hidden away in spectacular private gardens behind the Aya Sofya). These places are both operated by the same company. Rooms have original Ottoman-style furnishings complete with brass beds, simple chandeliers and ruffled curtains. Enjoy the most glamorous breakfast in town, served in a glass conservatory complete with chandeliers.

İbrahim Paşa Oteli (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-518 0394; www.ibrahimpasha.com; Terzihane Sokak 5, Sultanahmet; r standard/deluxe €125/175; 🏠 🏠 🏠) No doubt İbrahim Paşa would have given the nod to this mod Ottoman renovation borrowing his name. This très-chic guesthouse successfully combines Ottoman style with contemporary décor. The best standard rooms are 301, 302, 401 and 402. Room 404 is the best deluxe option, with a fabulously plush Ottoman recliner you'll never want to leave. Given the many pluses of this place it's a shame about the rooftop, that the staircase steals the best views, and that the rooms are tipping being overpriced. Tsk Tsk.

Yeşil Ev (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-517 6785; www.istanbul.yesilev.com; Kabasakal Caddesi 5, Sultanahmet; s/d €125/165; 🏠 🏠) Totally rebuilt in the '70s, this late-19th-century Ottoman mansion has been restored to its former glory as a splendid top-end option with a delightful courtyard – you won't want to leave it. Brass beds and chintz furnishings feature, but the bathrooms are a bit cramped.

Four Seasons Hotel İstanbul (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-638 8200; www.fourseasons.com; Tekkifhane Sokak 1, Sultanahmet; r €280-500; 🏠 🏠 🏠) What used to be the infamous Sultanahmet prison (remember *Midnight Express*?) is now İstanbul's swankiest hotel. The Four Seasons is known for its service (extraordinary), history (deliciously disreputable), location (right in the heart of Old İstanbul) and rooms (wow). Been sentenced to time at the Four Seasons? Get them to throw away the key.

If you prefer a fully furnished apartment you can't go wrong with the **Les Arts Turcs apartment** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-511 2198; www.istanbulrentals.com; İshakpaşa Caddesi 6, Sultanahmet; apt night/week €200/900; 🏠): three bedrooms on three floors, fully furnished kitchen, İznik-tiled bathrooms and free ADSL. But the best thing is the rooftop terrace offering ooh-la-la views of the Princes' Islands, Sea of Marmara and on to the Topkapı walls. We'd love to move in ourselves. Bargain for a better rate.

Beyoğlu & Around

Most travellers to İstanbul stay in Sultanahmet, but Beyoğlu is becoming a popular alternative. Stay here to avoid the tout press in Sultanahmet, and because buzzing, bohemian Beyoğlu has the best wining, dining and shopping in the city. Unfortunately there isn't the range or quality of accommodation options here that you'll find in Sultanahmet, but options are opening. Some apartments are included following, or you could check out www.istanbulrentals.com.

Getting to/from the historical sights of Old İstanbul is easy: either walk about half an hour, catch the Taksim Sq–Kabataş funicular and tram a few stops, or take a ride on the comfy T4 bus (see p160).

BUDGET

Saydam Hotel (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 8116; saydam@istanbulguide.net; Sofyalı Sokak 1, cnr Asmalimescit Sokak, Asmalimescit; s/d €15/25) Located a few steps off İstiklal and a short hip-swaying saunter to some of Beyoğlu's grooviest cafés and galleries, no-one would complain about the location. The same can't be said about the office-like décor, but heck, at this price who's complaining! Rooms are simple, small and reasonably well kept, provided you don't inspect too closely.

Chillout Hostel (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-249 4784; www.chillouthostel.com; Balyoz Sokak 17, Asmalimescit; dm/s/d €10/15/27; 🏠) If you're in İstanbul to party, you probably already know about Chillout. Offering cheap booze and rooms, Beyoğlu's first hostel is also a great place to hook up with like-minded travellers and locals primed to sample Beyoğlu's wicked nightlife. The squishy dorms are OK at a pinch, especially if you don't plan on spending too much time in them. Ditto the communal bathrooms: they're so small you can shower, go to the loo and preen yourself all at the same time!

World House Hostel (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 5520; www.worldhouseistanbul.com; Galipdede Caddesi 117, Galata; dm €10-14, s/d €35/40; 🏠) With an unbeatable foothold betwixt the hushed sights of Sultanahmet and the commotion of Beyoğlu, this colourful hostel is the best new kid on the block. Staff are welcoming, rooms generously sized, bathrooms shipshape, and the cosy street-level café serves up cheap, tasty grub and offers free wi-fi. The top dorms, rooms 10 and 11, share a balcony overlooking the Galata Tower, but a planned rooftop terrace

will give all superb views of the Bosphorus. The only downside is the minaret right next door – bring earplugs.

Bahar Apartment Hotel (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 0772; fax 244 1708; İstiklal Caddesi 61; 2-/3-bed apt €45/60) Fancy the idea of sitting in your own apartment with a bottle of wine and viewing the early evening promenade along İstiklal? You can do this at the Bahar. These basic apartments, which can sleep up to four, have enough room to park all your shopping bags, and are reasonably clean, but unfortunately have no kitchen facilities. Location is great if you're planning to party in the surrounding bars, hopeless if you want an early night.

Hotel Residence (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-252 7685; www.hotelresidence.com.tr; Sadri Alishık Sokak 19; s/d €40/50; 🏠) If you're here to party, and you want a cheapish, clean hotel to doss in then this no-nonsense place is for you. Note that Sadri Alishık Sokak is one of the busiest streets in the area, lined with cubby-hole bars, and has a vaguely sleazy air – not a great prospect for lone females. Negotiate to get better rates.

MIDRANGE

Büyük Londra Oteli (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 0670; www.londrahotel.net; Meşrutiyet Caddesi 117, Tepebaşı; s/d €55/70) The highlight of the 1892 Büyük Londra is its wonderfully preserved sitting room, which has barely been touched since its heyday as a dining room for well-heeled passengers fresh off the *Orient Express*. We love the ruffled curtains dangling with tassels, the gilded mouldings, the deep maroon carpets – and the bar. The gilded staircase, complete with mammoth Bohemian crystal chandelier, leads up to the rooms.... And this, folks, is the disappointing news. Rooms are a tad dusty and worn (very *Addams Family*), so ask for one that's been renovated.

Vardar Palace Hotel (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-252 2888; www.vardarhotel.com; Siraselviler Caddesi 54, Taksim; s/d €60/75; 🏠 🏠) Dried flower arrangements and faded carpets may remind you of your grandma's house, but this immaculately clean, small hotel just off Taksim Sq offers excellent value-for-money. Rooms at the rear are darkish but quiet; front rooms are light but face onto a noisy nightclub strip. Service can be so-so: it depends who you approach.

Galata Residence Apart Hotel (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-292 4841; www.galataresidence.com; Bankalar Caddesi, Felek Sokak 2, Galata; 1-/2-bed apt per day €65/110, per week €400/650; 🏠) A few steps down from

the Galata Tower, this historic building has been refurbished as an apart-hotel with a top-floor Greek restaurant and a bland modern annexe (for the one-bedroom apartments). Apartments are spacious and fully equipped, though you may have to chase up staff for kitchen utensils. Top marks go to the daily servicing and the extremely helpful staff. To find it, ask taxi drivers to drop you in front of the Oyak Bank at the corner of Voyvodca Caddesi and Haraççı Ali Sokak, and walk up the steep stairs.

Istanbul Holiday Apartments (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 8530; www.istanbulholidayapartments.com; apt per night €70-180 minimum stay three nights, per week €500-1200; 📍 🚶) Bereket Building (Camekar Sokak, Tünel) Gloria Building (Galata Kulesi Sokak, Tünel) Saying that holiday apartments in İstanbul are easy to find is like saying the sultans were celibate, which is why these apartments in two separate blocks near the Galata Tower are such a find. All have undergone a quality renovation and are beautifully kitted out with washer/dryer, fully equipped kitchen (with dishwasher), CD player and every other mod-con you can think of. Book well ahead for the best-value apartments (Gloria garden suite, with a private courtyard; the Penthouse Terrace; and the Duplex View). A great choice for families, but prime yourself for steps. Ask about the newly opened apartments in Cihangir.

Taksim Square Hotel (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-292 6440; www.taksimsquarehotel.com.tr; Siraselviler Caddesi 15, Taksim; s/d €80/100; 📍 🚶) With a fabulous location right by Taksim Sq, this ugly duckling is an excellent pick, so ignore its hideous façade. The modern, comfortable rooms have super views over the square or the Bosphorus. Arrive early for breakfast in the top-floor restaurant to grab a window-side table. Popular with locals.

TOP END

Anemon Galata (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 2343; www.anemonhotels.com; cnr Galata Meydanı & Büyükhendek Caddesi 11, Galata; s/d €100/120; 📍 🚶) In the shadow of the Galata Tower, Anemon Galata is a magnificent historic building converted into a lovely, intimate hotel. The rooms are individually decorated and impeccably tasteful in elegant Ottoman style. Some rooms have small wrought-iron balconies overlooking Galata Sq; others overlook the Golden Horn. But it's worth staying here for the restaurant alone, which boasts one of the best views in the city. Book well ahead.

Pera Palas Oteli (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 4560; www.perapalace.com; Meşrutiyet Caddesi 98-100, Tepebaşı; s/d €150/170; 📍 🚶) Built in 1894 to house passengers from the *Orient Express*, the grand old Pera has bedded a veritable roll-call of famous politicians, stars and artists. Built in grand European style, it's dripping with mammoth chandeliers, marble columns, acres of ruffled velvet curtains and painted ceiling mouldings – a ride in the wrought-iron 'birdcage' lift is an adventure in itself. The bedrooms are fabulously old-world too – ask for a room at the back on the 2nd or 3rd floor for views of the Golden Horn. Admittedly Pera's glory days have faded and you pay a premium for nostalgia here, but most guests who enjoy the buffet breakfast in the grand dining hall say any time spent in this living museum is money well spent. Check the Internet for specials.

Richmond Hotel (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-252 5460; www.richmondhotels.com.tr; İstiklal Caddesi 445, Tünel; s/d €135/165; 📍 🚶) We were in two minds whether to include this place, but the location convinced us. Right on bustling İstiklal Caddesi, there are few better places to base yourself for a pleasure or business visit to Beyoğlu. Standard rooms are comfortable if characterless, but the suites (€230) are knockouts, with modernist décor, great workstations, Jacuzzis and plasma TVs. Book a room at the back of the building for Bosphorus views and to ensure a good night's rest.

Marmara (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 4696; www.themarmarahotels.com; Taksim Sq; s €240-260, d €275-300; 📍 🚶 📺) Perfectly positioned right by Taksim Sq, this very popular hotel is an İstanbul institution. It's slick, plush and has all the five-star mod-cons you'd expect in a very friendly, laid-back, professional package. The splendid views (10th floor and up) and extremely comfortable rooms make it a good choice for tourists and businesspeople alike. There's a highly regarded rooftop restaurant and bar, a pool, a gym and a *hamam*. Breakfast costs an extra €21.

EATING

İstanbul is a food-lover's paradise. Teeming with affordable quick-eats joints, cafés and restaurants, it leaves visitors spoiled for choice when it comes to choosing a venue.

Unfortunately, the area where most visitors to the city stay – Sultanahmet – is disappointing when it comes to food. With the exceptions of top-class Balıkçı Sabahattin, the Tarihi Sultanahmet Köftçisi Selim Usta and

a handful of *pideci* (pide-makers), there are few restaurants worth writing home about. There are other pockets of Old İstanbul worth investigating – Eminönü has the wonderful Hamdi et Lokantası and Sirkeci has the excellent Hatay. On the whole, though, visitors should cross the Galata Bridge and join the locals eating in Beyoğlu. Nothing can beat the enjoyment of spending a night in a *meyhane* on Nevizade Sokak or dining at one of the über-cool restaurants overlooking the Bosphorus.

If you are planning to explore Üsküdar or the upper reaches of the Bosphorus, some possibilities for dining are listed from p126 and p130, respectively.

Close to Sultanahmet there are a number of small supermarkets. The best is **Greens** (Map pp96-7; Nuriostmaniye Sokak 1, Cağaloğlu; ☎ 7am-8.30pm). Beyoğlu also has many small supermarkets (including Gima) open daily; most are along Siraselviler Caddesi, running off Taksim Sq.

Sultanahmet & Around RESTAURANTS

Konuk Evi (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-517 6785; Soğukçeşme Sokak, Sultanahmet; mains €4-8; ☎ closed winter) In the hotel of the same name (p138), a secluded flower-filled garden and fairy tale-like glass conservatory around the corner from Aya Sofya are waiting just for you. Walk down Caferiye Sokak and go through the gate opposite Ayasofya Pansiyonları and you'll find the Konuk Evi, one of the most relaxing places in the city to enjoy an alfresco lunch. Salads, burgers, sandwich and grills are all good value considering the surrounds.

Hatay (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-522 8513; İbni Kemal Caddesi 9-11, Hocaapaşa; mains €5-11) It's a short stroll north of Sultanahmet's hotel district, but after one mouthful here all will be forgiven. Known for its fresh, quality meze – try the meze platter (€8.50) to sample a bit of everything – this is one of the few restaurants around here that caters as much for locals as it does for travellers. Service is fabulous, thanks to the friendly owner hovering in the background to make sure everything is just so. Grab a street-side table in fine weather.

Konyalı (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-513 9696; Topkapı Palace, Sultanahmet; mains €5-17; ☎ lunch) With its fabulous position in the grounds of Topkapı Palace and its charmingly down-at-heel-Riviera feel, Konyalı is a perennial favourite. There are few more pleasant experiences than sitting in its glass pavilion or on the outdoor terrace, both

of which overlook the Bosphorus and Sea of Marmara. You can enjoy a full-service meal, or choose from the buffet (meals €5 to €6).

Balıkçı Sabahattin (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-458 1824; Seyit Hasan Koyu Sokak 1, Cankurtaran; mains €8-20) The solid stream of chauffeur-driven limousines stopping outside Balıkçı Sabahattin is testament to its enduring popularity with the city's establishment. Indoor eating is in a wooden Ottoman house but most prefer to eat outside under a leafy canopy. The menu offers a limited range of delicious mezes and good-quality fresh fish. It's tucked away in a ramshackle street just near the train line.

Giritli (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-458 2270; Keresteci Hakkı Sokak, Cankurtaran; mains €8-20) A relatively new but very welcome addition to the local eatery scene, Giritli serves up Cretan dishes in a pretty walled garden or indoors in a creaky renovated Ottoman. You can order from the menu, but the restaurant specialises in its set banquet (€31) offering over 10 types of hot and cold meze, octopus, fish and more. It's a meal you won't forget in a hurry.

Dubb (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-513 7308; İncili Çavaş Sokak 10, Sultanahmet; mains €10-18) One of İstanbul's few Indian restaurants, Dubb serves a tepid tandoori, but it makes the grade for the simply stunning terrace with a full-view of Aya Sofya – book a table here. Tandooris are the speciality but there are curries and plenty of choices for vegetarians including the veggie banquet (€17). If you like your curries spicy, say so.

Rami (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-517 6593; Utangaç Sokak 6, Cankurtaran; mains €13-15) This restored Ottoman house has several quaint dining rooms decorated with impressionist-style paintings by Turkish painter Rami Uluer (1913-88), but the favoured spot for dinner is the rooftop terrace, which has a full view of the Blue Mosque – make sure you request a table there when you book. Ottoman specialities such as *kağıt kebab* (lamb and vegetables cooked in a paper pouch) are served; the service can be a little hit and miss.

Sarniç Restaurant (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-512 4291; Soğukçeşme Sokak, Sultanahmet; mains €16-18; ☎ dinner) Opposite the Konuk Evi, and run by the same people, the Sarniç is also wonderfully atmospheric being set in a candle-lit Byzantine Cistern. You must reserve in advance.

CAFÉS

Çiğdem Pastanesi (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-526 8859; Divan Yolu Caddesi 62A, Sultanahmet; börek €1) People have

been grazing the goodies here since 1961, and it's still going strong. Come here for a cappuccino that could hold its own on Via Veneto in Rome (€2) and a serve of their crunchy fresh cheese *börek*. Çiğdem's desserts sometimes look better than their taste, so stick to savouries.

Özsüt (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-512 7780; Hacı Tahsinbey Sokak 48, Sultanahmet; fırın sütlaç €2.50) Rice pudding devotees, your search is over. Özsüt makes the best *fırın sütlaç* in the city, and its other sweet offerings are worth the dental bills, too. There's a rooftop terrace with excellent views – if you can brave the stairs or squishy lift – and street-side seating. Tea and coffee are available as well.

QUICK EATS

Tarhi Sultanahmet Köftecisi Selim Usta (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-520 0566; Divan Yolu 12; mains €2.50-5) Don't get this place confused with the other *köfte* (meatballs) places along this strip purporting to be the *meşhur* (famous) *köfte* restaurant: No 12 is the real McCoy. Hungry locals in-the-know flock here for a serve of the best *köfte* you'll ever grease your palate with, followed by a serve of its equally famous semolina. Do yourself a favour and ease your belt a notch or two.

Karadeniz Aile Pide ve Kebap Salonu (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-528 6290; Hacı Tahsinbey Sokak 1, Sultanahmet; mains €2.50-5) This long-timer, off Divan Yolu, serves a tasty *mercimek* (lentil soup), perfect for breakfast, and is also known for its pide (€2.50 to €4). Around the corner is an alley packed with Karadeniz pide joints, all hoping to cash in on the original Karadeniz' success.

Erol Taş Kültür Merkez (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-518 1257; Cankurtaran Meydanı 18, Cankurtaran; mains €2.50-5) Erol Taş, one of Turkish cinema's most famous personalities, acted the villain in some 800 films. He ran this café as a hang-out for his contemporaries until his death in 1998. Today it's still the area's most popular hang-out, inevitably filled with locals drinking *çay*, playing backgammon and puffing on *nargileh*. *Pathcanlı kebab* (eggplant kebab) costs €3 and pides range from €2.50 to €3.

Cennet (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-513 5098; Yeniçeriler Caddesi 90, Çemberlitaş; kebaps €4) Only the cheesy nightclubs offering 'live Turkish shows' come near to emulating the kitsch of this 'Anatolian' restaurant. Set in part of the historic Çemberlitaş Hamam, it encourages diners to don Ottoman costumes, recline 'Ottoman-

style' and listen to 'Ottoman' musicians (noon to 9.30pm) while noshing on *gözleme* (savoury filled pancakes), the restaurant's speciality. Consider yourself warned.

Doy-Doy (Fill up! Fill up! Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-517 1588; Şifa Hamamı Sokak 13; mains €3-8) You'd have to describe the food as stodgy but the fans don't care at this no-fuss traveller-friendly stalwart. Backpackers come for the superb top-floor terrace views and the extensive menu, which has something for everyone, including vegetarians. No alcohol is served.

Bazaar District RESTAURANTS

Havuzlu Restaurant (Map p116; ☎ 0212-527 3346; Gani Çelebi Sokak 3, Grand Bazaar; mains €6-13; ☎ 11.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) There are few more pleasant experiences than parking one's shopping bags and enjoying a meal at the Grand Bazaar's best eatery. A lovely space with vaulted ceiling, pale lemon walls and ornate central light-fitting, Havuzlu serves up excellent fare to hungry hordes of tourists and shopkeepers. Ask the waiter to recommend a dish to ensure the best eating experience.

Pandeli (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0212-522 5534; Mısır Çarşısı 1, Eminönü; mezes €3-5, mains €7.50-15; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) What a shame that the food and who-cares service at this İstanbul institution don't live up to the beautiful surrounds. Three salons encrusted with stunning turquoise-glazed İznik tiles and furnished with chandeliers and richly upholstered banquettes are perched above the main waterside entrance to the Spice Market;

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Hamdi Et Lokantası (Hamdi Meat Restaurant; Map pp98-9; ☎ 0212-528 0390; Kalçın Sokak 17, Eminönü; kebaps €4.50-8) A favourite İstanbul haunt since 1970, Hamdi's phenomenal views, overlooking the bustling Golden Horn and Galata, are matched by some of the city's best kebaps. Ignore the meze menu and choose from the meze platter presented with a flourish by the waiter: the *şuksuka* (roasted eggplant and tomatoes) and *haydari* (yogurt with roasted eggplant and garlic) are resolutely to-die-for. The kebaps are all so good it's impossible to choose, but luckily you don't have to with the excellent mixed kebab (€6). Book ahead and request a spot on the terrace.

FOLLOW YOUR NOSE

Many visitors are pleasantly surprised to discover İstanbul has superb cheeses, olives, pickles, seasonal and dried fruits, sweets, nuts and *pastırma* (dried beef) available everywhere. Exploring the taste sensations in the city's markets and *şarküteri* (delicatessens) is a must.

In Eminönü, the streets around the **Spice Market** (Mısır Çarşısı, Map pp98-9) are pungent with the scent of freshly ground coffee, fresh fish, peaks of fragrant cumin and chilli, rolled *pestil* (sun-dried fruit pulp sheets), and much more. You could put on several kilos smelling the air here. Make sure you wedge your way into a queue at **Nimla Pastırmacı** (below), which has been serving happy customers since the 1920s.

In Beyoğlu, the streets around the **Balık Pazar** (Fish Market; Map pp100-1), next to the Çiçek Pasajı on İstiklal Caddesi, are well worth following your nose to. You'll have fun discovering your own favourites, but we recommend you don't pass by **Petek** (Map pp100-1; Dudu Odaları Sokak 7), a cubby-hole-sized pickle emporium, and the famous rose jam (*gül reçel*; €2.50) at **Üç Yıldız** (Map pp100-1; Dudu Odaları Sokak 15).

For the city's best Turkish delight head to **Ali Muhiddin Hacı Bekir** (p153) – its delight with crunchy coffee beans is particularly tasty. For the best baklava in the city take your sticky fingers to **Karaköy Güllüoğlu** (p145).

For seasonal fruit and vegetables and home-made produce such as pickles, cheese and olives you should take your elbows to joust at the street markets. **Oyuncu Sokak** (Map pp96-7), near the lighthouse in Cankurtaran (near Sultanahmet) has a street market on Wednesday; even better is the Thursday **Gerdanlık Sokak** (Map pp98-9) market west of Kumkapı fish restaurants, which can be found on or near Çarparız Sokak. The markets are busiest during the early evening.

climb the stone stairs to enter. Once inside, we recommend the *patlıcan böreği* (eggplant pickle pastry) and the Pandeli *tatlı* for dessert, but not much else.

CAFÉS

Colheti Cafe & Restaurant (Map p116; ☎ 0212-512 5094; Sandal Bedesteni 36, Grand Bazaar; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) This café is inside the bazaar's former auction hall; enjoy lunch here, and the historic atmosphere will flavour your meal. Guests sit in comfortable cane chairs and enjoy döner kebaps (€4.50), sandwiches (€3) and salads (€4 to €5). The best thing about the place is that it's licensed. A beer costs €2.50.

Fez Café (Map p116; ☎ 0212-527 3684; Halıcılar Caddesi 62; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Set in a rough-stone den, the popular Fez is a modern Western-style café on one of the bazaar's most atmospheric streets, but you'll pay a premium to sit at the flower-adorned tables (sandwiches cost €4 and salads €4.50 to €6).

Café Sultan (Map p116; ☎ 0212-527 3684; Halıcılar Caddesi; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Next door to the Fez, it offers similar fare for slightly cheaper prices.

QUICK EATS

Hafız Mustafa Şekerlemeleri (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-526 5627; Hamidiye Caddesi 84-86, Eminönü; sweets €2-3) Since

1864 Hafız has been satisfying happy customers and we know why. This shrine to sugar serves baklava so delicious you'll be thankful you don't live locally or you could make yourself a nuisance here. Hafız is also known for its *Meşhur Tekirdağ Peynir Helvası*, a yellow, goopy cheese *helva* made in only a handful of places around the country, and sold here by the tray load.

Meşhur Kuru Fasulyeci (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0212-513 6219; Prof. Sıddık Sami Onar Caddesi 11, Süleymaniye; mains €2-3) Join the crowds of hungry locals at this long-time institution in the former *kütüphanesi medrese* of the Süleymaniye mosque. It has been dishing up its spicy signature *fasulye* (broad bean) dish for some 80 years. Best enjoyed with *ayran* (yogurt drink).

Nimla Pastırmacı (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0212-511 6393; Hasırcılar Caddesi 14, Eminönü; mains €3-4; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat) Delicatessens don't get any better than this. Nimla's mouth-watering selection of cheeses, *pastırma* and meze are known throughout the city. Fight your way to the counter and order a tasty fried *pastırma* roll packed with your choice of point-and-choose ingredients (€3) or a takeaway container of meze. Those-in-the-know eat what they've bought upstairs in the floral cafeteria or find a seat up there for a quick, scrumptious feed.

TOP 5 BARS/RESTAURANTS WITH VIEWS

5 Kat, Cihangir (below) Locals' favourite high haunt. **360**, Galatasaray (right) Glam restaurant and open-air bar with, you guessed it, 360-degree views.

Hotel Arcadia, Sultanahmet (see p138) Average hotel, knockout views: leaves all others in shadow.

Legend Hotel, Binbirdirek (p148) Peer out over the Sea of Marmara.

Leb-i Derya, Tünel (right) Not quite up with 360's views, but here you'll keep your hairdo.

Beyoğlu & Around RESTAURANTS

Karaköyüm (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-244 6808; Kemeraltı Caddesi 4, Karaköy; mains €4-8.50) Locals come here when they're homesick and feel like a bit of *anne's* (mama's) hearty home cooking. Regularly featured in the 'best of' lists in Istanbul, the Karaköyüm dishes up perennial favourites such as *limonlu tavuk* (lemon chicken) as well as Ottoman classics. All in pleasant, stylish surrounds with views over the Golden Horn. If mama had a view like this you'd drop in for dinner more often! It's on the 6th floor.

Zencefil (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-243 8234; Kurabiye Sokak 8, Beyoğlu; mains €5-9; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This popular vegetarian café is comfortable and quietly stylish, with a lovely leafy courtyard. Go for the daily and weekly specials to get crunchy-fresh produce (all organic) and guilt-free desserts. A slab of the home-made bread is a definite highlight. There's a great range of herbal teas, too.

5 Kat (Beşinci Kat; Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 3774; 5th fl, Soğanlı Sokak 7/5, Cihangir; mains €6-10; 🍴 10am-2am Mon-Fri & 10.30am-3am Sat & Sun) This long-timer is a local's hang-out on lazy weekend mornings when the mixed crowd leaf through the complimentary liberal *Radikal* newspaper. But even this won't allow an expat's English breakfast (€8) with fried pork sausages go cold. All the international-style meals are excellent – welcoming service and sublime views over the Bosphorus complete the picture. At night it's an excellent bar (p149).

Hacı Abdullah (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 8561; Sakızağacı Caddesi 17, Beyoğlu; mezes €3.30, mains €6-12) Just thinking about Hacı Abdullah's sensational *imam bayıldı* (eggplant stuffed with ground lamb, tomatoes, onions and garlic) makes our taste buds go into overdrive. This Istanbul institution (established in 1888) is probably

the city's best *lokanta* (Turkish restaurant) and one of the essential gastronomic stops you should make when in town. No alcohol.

Hacı Baba (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-244 1886; İstiklal Caddesi 49, Beyoğlu; mezes €3, mains €6-12; 🍴) While not as old as nearby rival Hacı Abdullah, the food and surroundings here are just as impressive, though it's firmly on the package-tour itinerary. There's a large nonsmoking section overlooking the main strip and a vine-garlanded terrace for alfresco dining. Best of all, you can order a beer, *rakı* (aniseed-flavoured grape brandy) or wine with your meal.

Leb-i Derya (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 4989; Kumbarcı Yokuşu 115/7, Tünel; mains €7-15; 🍴 11am-2am Mon-Fri, 8.30am-3am Sat & Sun) You can gauge the gastro-calibre of an expat or local if they know about stylish Leb-i Derya. Those *not-in-the-know* obviously haven't surrendered to the delights of the *mahmudiye* (€11), an inspired blend of spices over succulent chunks of chicken. There aren't many places in this city to get a darn fine breakfast, but this is one of them. The 'greenpeace' (€7) is a yogurt muesli mix with fresh OJ and *lor*, the melt-in-the-mouth Turkish ricotta. This is one restaurant in Istanbul where you want to avoid the meze (especially the Ottoman starters), and save yourself for mains and dessert. And did we mention the knock-out views? Go.

360 (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 1042; İstiklal Caddesi 32/309, Galatasaray; mains €8-15; 🍴 1-3pm & 7.30pm-3am Tue-Sun) This is fine dining at its best. A rooftop with a panorama envied by all in the trade starts 360-degrees ahead of the pack and it just keeps running. From the unflappable staff divining your every desire to superb meals such as melt-in-the-mouth goat-cheese balls with grilled pear, steaks, no-fuss pastas, and Miss Piggy Pizza, there's something for everyone. Ignore the somewhat menacing doorman and head straight to the table of your choice; for drinks only, swagger your way to the terrace. The 360 is on the top floor of the Mısır Apartments; take the stairs to make the most of this gorgeous apartment block. Book ahead on weekends.

CAFÉS

İnci (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-243 2412; İstiklal Caddesi 124, Beyoğlu) İstanbul's naughty secret is to sidestep into vintage İnci for a sinful fix of the city's best profiteroles (€2), and then to reappear on İstiklal as if nothing ever happened. Join the sinners – it's standing room only.

kaffeehaus (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 4028; Tünel Meydanı 4, Tünel) A perennial favourite, welcoming, stylish kaffeehaus is always humming with a local arty set, who monopolise its tables for long breakfasts and a coffee hit (€2.50) whenever the shakes set in. In warmer weather the café's front opens onto Tünel Sq and provides great people-watching opportunities.

Saray Muhallebicisi (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-292 3434; İstiklal Caddesi 173, Beyoğlu; sweets €2-4) This *muhallebici* (milk pudding shop) has been dishing up puddings since 1935, and we can't fault them. And it's always packed with locals scratching their heads trying to decide which of the 35-odd varieties of sweets it's to be. If you've wanted to try an *aşure* or *kazandibi*, this is the place to do it.

Patisserie Markiz (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 8394; İstiklal Caddesi 360-2, Beyoğlu) Everything at Markiz is a work of art: the gloriously restored Art Nouveau interior, the delectable cakes and pastries, and the starched aprons on the suitably glamorous staff. Sipping a Turkish coffee (€3) and devouring a piece of the chocolate gâteau (€4) here feels very civilised.

QUICK EATS

Güney Restaurant (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-249 0393; Kuledibi Şah Kapısı 6, Tünel; mains €3-7; 🍴 Mon-Sat) You won't write home about the food here but Güney is a no-fuss eatery popular with travellers and locals alike. It's a good pick for female travellers, too. Grab a window seat in the rustic ground-floor salon or fall into the comfy red couches in the more upmarket salon upstairs.

Konak (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-252 0684; İstiklal Caddesi 259, Beyoğlu; mains €3.50-7) Despite the cheesy exterior this long-time no-fuss favourite serves up a parade of surprisingly good kebabs with piping-hot pide in delightfully old-fashioned surrounds. This is also a great place to try Turkey's famous, but hard-to-find, *Marış ice cream*. There's another branch near Tünel, but this one is much better.

Musa Usta Ocakbaşı Adana Kebap Salonu (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 2932; Küçük Parmakkapı Sokak 14, Beyoğlu; mains €5-7) Three floors of old-fashioned atmosphere, plus excellent food, have kept this buzzing place in business for years. An excellent spot to sit alongside the *ocakbaşı* (grill), while you watch your meat grilled to perfection. You can drink beer or *rakı* here, too.

Beşiktaş & Ortaköy

Vogue (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-227 4404; BJK Plaza, A Blok Kat 13, Spor Caddesi, Akaretler, Beşiktaş; mains €15-30) Grace Jones purrs on the sound system, trained Japanese sushi chefs perform wonders with a sliver of tuna and well-trained waiters make sense of a large and thoughtful wine list. The food here is as sensational as the views over the Bosphorus. Ask for a table on the terrace.

While Ortaköy's restaurants specialise in tasty weekend breakfasts, **Zeliş Café'de** (Map pp94-5) sets the standard with its great-value open buffet (€5). Ortaköy's other speciality is *kumpir* (baked potato) stuffed with sour cream, olive paste, cheese, chilli, bulgur, and anything else you can squeeze in (€3.50). Buy these by the church. **Çınar** (Plane Tree; Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-261 5818; İskele Meydanı 42, Ortaköy; meze €3.50-6, mains €5.50-8) is our favourite of the waterside restaurants for a dinner of seafood mezes (yum). Afterwards, slip into **Mado** (Map pp94-5; İskele Meydanı, Ortaköy, cone €2-50-3.50), next door, for a cone of Turkey's famous *Marış dondurma* (ice cream).

Western Districts

Develi (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-529 0833; Gümüşyüzük Sokak 7, Samatya; mains €7-12) This place has been serving up kebabs to hungry locals since 1912, so it really knows what it's doing when it comes to the national dish. Near the city wall at Samatya, its five floors (including a roof terrace) are always full of happy punters enjoying the flavours of southeastern Anatolia. Try the *çig köfte* (raw ground lamb, bulgur, onions and spices) and the *fıstıklı kebab* (pistachio kebab) and you'll feel happy too. To get here, catch a taxi along the coastal road (Kennedy Caddesi)

SHRINE TO BAKLAVA

Karaköy Güllüoğlu (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 0910; Rıhtım Caddesi, Katlı Otopark Altı, Karaköy; 🍴 Mon-Sat) We're going to stick our necks out here and say this divine tooth-killer makes Istanbul's, and maybe even Turkey's, best baklava. The Güllü family's first shop fittingly opened in Gaziantep, Turkey's baklava capital, before they brought their delectable offerings to ever-grateful İstanbul. Fill a box with their classics – *fıstıklı* (pistachio) and the rich, custardy *sütlü nuriye* – and win the heart of any prospective mother-in-law.

from Sultanahmet or the train from Sirkeci Train Station (get off at Kocamustafapaşa Station). You'll find the Develi inland from the station in a plaza filled with parked cars.

Asitane (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-635 7997; Kariye Otel, Kariye Camii Sokak 18, Edimekapı; mains €8-12) It's not often that you'll get to taste Ottoman dishes devised for the 16th-century royal circumcision feast, but that's what's on offer here. The food is magnificent, served in modern, elegant surrounds with a charming outdoor courtyard in summer. Vegetarians are well catered for, too.

Zeyrekhane (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0212-532 2778; İbadethane Arkası Sokak 10; mains €11-15; ☎ Tue-Sun) This place, adjacent to Zeyrek Camii, has an outdoor

garden with cushioned couches on which you can recline and soak up the superb view of the Süleymaniye Camii and the Golden Horn. It serves tasty mains (fancy quail kebab served with eggplant?) and snacks.

DRINKING

It may be the biggest city in a predominantly Muslim country, but let us assure you that İstanbul's population likes nothing more than a drink or three. If the raki-soaked atmosphere in the city's *meyhanes* isn't a clear enough indicator (below), a foray into the thriving bar scene around Beyoğlu will confirm it. You could spend a month bar-hopping in Beyoğlu and still only scratch the surface.

MEYHANE: THE BIGGEST PARTY IN TOWN

If you only have one night out on the town when you visit İstanbul, make sure you spend it a *meyhane* (tavern) in Beyoğlu. Buried in the maze of narrow streets behind the historic Çiçek Pasajı (Flower Passage) on İstiklal Caddesi, **Nevizade Sokak** is one of the most famous eating precincts in the city and it's certainly the most atmospheric. On any night of the week its taverns will be full of chattering locals sampling the dizzying array of mezes and fresh fish on offer, washed down with a never-ending supply of raki (aniseed-flavoured grape brandy). Vendors wander from table to table selling fresh almonds and at some places small groups of musicians entertain diners with *fasıl* music (Ottoman classical, usually played by gypsies) and wisecracks in return for tips (anything less than €3 per musician would be insulting). The whole experience is enormous fun. On summer Friday and Saturday evenings the street literally heaves with people looking for a table, grabbing a drink at one of the bars along the strip or just wandering past.

Other *meyhanes* are along Sofyalı Sokak, opposite the Tünel, or in Kumkapı, near Sultanahmet (see p109). These are some of the best *meyhanes* in the city:

Boncuk Restaurant (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-243 1219; Nevizade Sokak 19, Beyoğlu; meze €3-6, fish €4-11) Armenian specialities differentiate Boncuk from its Nevizade neighbours. Try the excellent, super-fresh *topik* (mezes made with chickpeas, pistachios, onion, flour, currants, cumin and salt).

Despina (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-247 3357; Açıkyol Sokak 9, Kurtuluş; meze €4.50-7; ☎ noon-midnight) Established in 1946 by the glamorous Madame Despina, whose stylish photograph greets guests at the entrance, Despina is one of the best *meyhanes* in the city. The Armenian-Greek food is good, but plays second fiddle to the live *fasıl* music, which is played by some of the country's most accomplished musicians. Large tables of locals join in the singing and everyone has a great time. Get here by taxi (€8 from Sultanahmet, €5 from Beyoğlu).

Ney'le Mey'le (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-249 8103; Nevizade Sokak 12, Beyoğlu; meze €2-6, fish €5-9) Opposite the Boncuk, it's always one of the busiest restaurants in town.

Refik (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-243 2834; Sofyalı Sokak 10, Tünel; meze €3-6, fish €7-10; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) Refik is the original *meyhane* in the Asmalimescit area. It's a convivial cubby-hole famous for both its genial host, Refik Arslan, who will make you feel welcome the minute you set foot through the door, and its speciality, Black Sea fish.

Sofyalı 9 (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 0362; Sofyalı Sokak 9, Tünel; meze €4-8, grills €5-10; ☎ Mon-Sat) Tables here are hot property on Friday and Saturday nights, and no wonder. This gem of a place serves up some of the best *meyhane* food in the city, and does so in surroundings as welcoming as they are attractive. Regulars swear by the *Arnavut ciğeri* (Albanian fried liver, €5).

Yakup 2 (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-249 2925; Asmalimescit Caddesi 35/37, Tünel; meze €4.50-7; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) This darkly lit den is a long-time favourite for locals who don't want to limit their *meyhane* carousing to the summer months: come here when it's cool as the outdoor area isn't atmospheric, but indoors its shoulder-to-shoulder carousing on Friday and Saturday nights. It offers grills but stick to a parade of meze.

GAY & LESBIAN İSTANBUL

The gay scene in İstanbul has been characterised as homely rather than raunchy; 'all about boys going out in trousers neatly pressed by their mothers who have no idea that they are gay', is how one aficionado summed it up. That said, there is a group in pursuit of the hirsute, the 'bears' (www.ayilar.net). The lesbian scene is typically harder to pin down: it's here, there, a little bit everywhere. One of the best options for lesbians is to contact Lambda (p659), which regularly hosts events.

There are an increasing number of openly gay bars and nightclubs in the city, mainly around the Taksim Sq end of İstiklal Caddesi. See the Gay & Lesbian section in the monthly *Time Out İstanbul* to find out what's on. For accommodation options, you may want to check out **Gay Friendly Hotels of İstanbul** (www.istanbulgay.com).

Hamams are a gay fave, though as they're unofficially gay, don't expect much slap and tickle. Despite being a little run-down, **Çukurcuma Hamamı** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-243 2401; Çukurcuma Caddesi 57, Çukurcuma; bath & massage €23, bath only €12; ☎ 10am-9pm) is the city's *hamam* most favoured by gays. **Park Hamam** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-513 7204; Dr Emin Paşa Sokak 10, Sultanahmet; bath & massage €20, bath only €11.50; ☎ 7am-midnight), off Divan Yolu, is popular with local and travelling gay men – and a few straights too.

Follow the fluttering rainbow flag to the laid-back **Sugarclub** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 0096; Sakasalim Çikmazı 7, Beyoğlu; mains €5-8; ☎ 11am-midnight). Bag a beanbag and lie back for a damn fine spot of grazing – food that is. Late evening, head to **Bar Bahçe** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 1718; www.barbahce.com; Soğancı Sokak 7/1, Cihangir; ☎ 10pm-2am Sun & Tue-Thu, 10pm-4am Fri & Sat), beloved hang-out of a super-looking 20-something set, or the outrageously fun **Cahide on5** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-292 2425; Meşrutiyet Caddesi 193, Beyoğlu; ☎ noon-4am Wed, Fri & Sat; admission €12) with drag shows and cheeky butt pinching aplenty. Cahide takes its naughty self to a close by outdoor venue (Maçka Demokrasi Parkı 13) during the steamy summer months.

Alternatively, you could go check out the alcohol-free, atmosphere-rich *çay bahçesis* (tea gardens) or *kahvehanes* (coffeehouses) dotted around the Old City. These are great places to relax and sample that Turkish institution, the nargileh, accompanied by a cup of *Türk kahvesi* (Turkish coffee) or *çay*. Although there are many spots to sample nargilehs in the Old City, the most popular nargileh spot in İstanbul is beside the Nusretiye Camii (Map pp100-1) just off Necatibey Caddesi in Tophane, below Beyoğlu.

Tea Gardens & Coffeehouses

SULTANAHMET & AROUND

Set Üstü Çay Bahçesi (Map pp96-7; Gülhane Parkı, Sultanahmet; ☎ 10am-11pm) Locals know this place is special, which is why on weekends they parade all the way through Gülhane Park to get there. Order a pot of *çay* (€4.50), a *tost* (toast), and join the congregation in admiring İstanbul's magnificent Bosphorus.

Yeni Marmara (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-516 9013; Çayroğlu Sokak, Küçük Ayasofya; ☎ 8am-midnight) This cavernous tea house is always packed with locals playing backgammon, sipping *çay* (€1) and puffing on nargilehs (€3). The place has

bags of character, featuring rugs, wall hangings and low brass tables. In winter a wood stove keeps the place cosy; in summer patrons sit on the rear terrace and look out over the Sea of Marmara.

Café Meşale (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-518 9562; Arasta Bazaar, Utangaç Sokak, Sultanahmet; ☎ 8am-1am) Generations of backpackers have joined locals in claiming one of Meşale's cushioned benches under coloured lights and enjoying a *çay* (€1) and nargileh (€5). In the summer months there's live Turkish music and whirling dervish performances at 8pm nightly. It's in a sunken courtyard behind the Blue Mosque.

Derviş Aile Çay Bahçesi (Dervish Family Tea Garden; Map pp96-7; Mimar Mehmet Ağa Caddesi, Sultanahmet; ☎ 9am-11pm, closed winter) Locations don't come any better than this. Directly opposite the Blue Mosque, the Derviş' paved courtyard beckons patrons with its comfortable cane chairs and shady trees. Efficient service, reasonable prices and peerless people-watching opportunities make it a great place for leisurely *çay*, nargileh and game of backgammon. There are two-hour dervish performances nightly from 8pm mid-May to October.

BAZAAR DISTRICT

Erenler Çay Bahçesi (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0212-528 3785; Yeniçeriler Caddesi 36/28; ☎ 9am-midnight, later in summer) Packed to the rafters with students from nearby İstanbul University doing their best to live up to their genetic heritage (ie develop a major tobacco addiction), this nargileh place is set in the leafy courtyard of the Çorlulu Ali Paşa Medrese. There are a handful of carpet shops here, which makes it a little touristy, but it's a delightful spot nonetheless.

Etham Tezçakar Kahveci (Map p116; Hacılar Caddesi, Grand Bazaar; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) This teeny tea and coffee stop is smack-bang in the middle of Hacılar Caddesi. Its traditional brass-tray tables and wooden stools stand in stark contrast to the funky Fez Café opposite.

İlesam Lokali (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0212-511 2618; Yeniçeriler Caddesi 84; ☎ 7am-midnight, later in summer) Set in the courtyard of the Koca Sinan Paşa Medrese, this club was formed by the enigmatically named Professional Union of Owners of the Works of Science & Literature. Fortunately, members seem happy for strangers to infiltrate their ranks. It's a great place to enjoy a cheap çay (€0.80) and nargileh (€3). After entering through the gate to Koca Sinan Paşa's tomb, go past the cemetery and it's the second tea house to the right.

Lale Bahçesi (Map pp98-9; Sifahane Sokak, Süleymaniye; ☎ 8am-midnight) In a sunken courtyard that was once part of the Süleymaniye külliye (mosque complex), this charming tea garden is always full of students from the nearby theological college and İstanbul University, who come here to sit on cushioned seats under trees and relax while watching the pretty fountain. In winter they huddle inside the warmly lit kilim-clad külliye. It's one of the authentic and atmospheric spots in the area to enjoy a çay and nargileh.

Şark Kahvesi (Map p116; ☎ 0212-512 1144; Yaglıklar Caddesi 134, Grand Bazaar; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) The Şark has had a long pedigree as a popular spot for stall-holders to come and enjoy a

tea-break. These days they have to fight for space with tourists, who love the quirky 'flying dervish' murals, old photographs on the walls and cheap çay (€0.80).

BEYOĞLU

Haco Pulo (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-244 4210; Passage ZD Hazzopulo; İstiklal Caddesi; ☎ 9am-midnight) There aren't nearly as many traditional tea houses in Beyoğlu as there are in atmospheric Old İstanbul, but this one can hold its own in any tea-house-off with its neighbour. Set in a delightfully picturesque, cobbled and leafy courtyard, on early summer evenings its stool-to-stool 20- to 30-somethings here. Walking from İstiklal Caddesi through the skinny arcade crowded with offbeat shops adds to the experience. A must.

Bars**SULTANAHMET**

Put simply, there isn't a lot going on in Sultanahmet, and what is here certainly isn't frequented by locals. Off season, the bars are empty. Beyoğlu is where it's at.

Cheers Bar (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0532-409 6369; Akbiyik Caddesi 20, Cankurtaran; ☎ 10am-2am) Slap-bang in the middle of backpacker central, this ugly timber-clad bar offers chilled street-side drinking and a late-night knees-up if there are plenty of travellers in town. Just Bar, next door, offers more of the same.

Şah Pub & Bar (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-519 5807; İncili Çavaş Sokak 11, Sultanahmet; ☎ 10am-3am) If you're looking for Sex on the Beach or a Long Slow Screw Against the Wall (the cocktails, of course), you'll be happy here. With indoor and street-side lounging options this place is either jumping or deathly quiet. At least you can stroll past and deduce the verve before committing. When it buzzes, it's mostly backpackers here enjoying a beer (€2) and nargileh (€4.50).

Legend Hotel (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-518 3348; Peykhane Caddesi 16, Binbirdirek; ☎ 3-11pm) As a hotel, Legend doesn't really make it on the radar, but its outdoor rooftop bar is well worth visiting for the simply awe-inspiring views over the Sea of Marmara – and its reasonable prices (beer €2). Don't come here to party, come here to quietly toast another day.

Sultan Pub (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-511 5638; Divan Yolu Caddesi 2, Sultanahmet; ☎ 9.30am-1am) Sultanahmet's version of Ye Olde English Pub, the Sultan, has been around for years and continues to

attract 30- or 40ish crowds due to the rooftop terrace (super views) and people-watching from the street-side tables. The pub grub is what you would expect from a place like this (ie stodge).

Yeşil Ev (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-517 6785; Kabasakal Caddesi 5, Sultanahmet; ☎ noon-10.30pm) The rear courtyard of this historic hotel (p138) is an oasis for those who want a quiet drink in elegant Ottoman-era surrounds. A beer costs €4, a glass of wine €5 and a çay €2.50.

BEYOĞLU

There are hundreds of bars in Beyoğlu with new ones opening up seemingly every night. We've listed the first-rate stayers here with a mix of newbies, but the best thing to do is to go explore yourself. Before you get too adventurous, make sure you assess bars carefully before entering. Most are very welcoming, but there are a few dodgy ones you don't want to stumble into (see p655). The no-windowed, ad-plugged, letterboxed, basement bar is probably going to bring you surprises you'd prefer not to have.

Most bars in Beyoğlu are packed in the side streets up the northern end of İstiklal Caddesi, near Taksim Sq. İmam Adnan Caddesi is lined with street-side drinking holes such as Türkü Cafe and Bar, Life Rooftop, and old-timer Kaktüs. Beyoğlu's hippest watering holes are down the Tünel end; explore around Sofyalı Sokak.

Badehane (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-249 0550; General Yazgan Sokak 5, Tünel; ☎ 9am-2am) This teeny (unsigned) watering hole is a favourite with locals, and no wonder. On a balmy evening the laneway is heaving with chattering, chain-smoking artsy folk, sipping a beer or three. Dress down and come ready to enjoy an attitude-free evening.

5 Kat (Beşinci Kat; Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 3774; 5th fl Soğanlı Sokak 7/5, Cihangir; ☎ 11am-2am) Everyone knows 5 Kat, which is a credit to its longevity, hospitality and consistent quality. One of the city's best bars, it's also an excellent restaurant (see p144). The 'boudoir-chic' décor features deep-red walls, satin ceiling, velvet chairs and candles galore. The Bosphorus views from the picture windows are simply breathtaking, and in warmer weather you can enjoy them from the breezy rooftop terrace.

KeVe (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 4338; Tünel Geçidi 10, Tünel; ☎ 8.30am-2.30am) Is this the most atmospheric bar in the city? In a plant-filled Belle

TOP 5 NARGİLEH JOINTS

Raft of nargileh joints, Tophane (p147) İstanbul's busiest scene.

Lale Bahçesi, Süleymaniye (opposite) Peaceful and pretty.

Yeni Marmara, Küçük Ayasofya (p147) Perfect for a chilly night.

Erenler Çay Bahçesi, Bazaar District (opposite) Amateurs welcome.

Café Meşale, Sultanahmet (p147) Groups welcome.

Epoque arcade opposite the Tünel station, KeVe is invariably full of 30- to 40-somethings enjoying supreme people-watching from its corner side vantage. An excellent spot for a pre- or post-meal beer (€3).

Gizle Bahçe (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-249 2192; Nevzade Sokak 27, Beyoğlu; ☎ 3pm-2am Tue-Sun) Comfy and casual, this homely option is the perfect pick when you want to check out the action on busy Nevzade Sokak, but you don't want to eat. Locals bag a street-side table for a beer or two to imbibe the feel-good vibe before heading off elsewhere. Beers are cheap at €2.

Dulcinea (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-425 1071; Meşelik Sokak 20, Taksim; ☎ 3pm-2am) Beyoğlu bars come and go, but Dulcinea keeps going thanks to its recent refurbishment from a stylish bar into a happening late-night venue. Grab one of the bar stools and strike up a conversation with a regular – you're bound to enjoy yourself.

Klub Karaoke (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 7639; Zambak Sokak 15, Beyoğlu; admission €12; ☎ 5pm-2am Mon-Sat) It had to happen. Some bright spark knew Turks would take to Karaoke like ducks to water and recently opened İstanbul's first Karaoke venue. Locals come in large gaggles and book out the huge private rooms but the 'İstanbul Central' room is a free-for-all, so check your pride in at the door and enjoy. A fun night with new friends guaranteed.

ENTERTAINMENT

There's an entertainment option for everyone in İstanbul. With its array of cinemas, almost religious devotion to all forms of music and great love of dance, it's rare to have a week go by when there's not a special event, festival or performance scheduled. In fact, the only thing that you can't do in this town is be bored.

For an overview of what's on in town make sure you pick up a copy of *Time Out İstanbul*

TOP THREE TEA GARDENS

Set Üstü Çay Bahçesi, Sultanahmet (p147)

Park setting with Bosphorus views.

Haco Pulo, Beyoğlu (right) Maximum atmosphere, a few steps off İstiklal Caddesi.

Erenler Çay Bahçesi, Bazaar District (above) Historic setting and welcoming staff.

(see p103) and check out **Biletix** (☎ 0216-556 9800; www.biletix.com). You can buy tickets for most events either at the venue's box office or through Biletix. Biletix outlets are found in many spots throughout the city, but the most convenient for travellers is the **Ada Bookshop outlet** (Map pp100-1; İstiklal Caddesi 330, Beyoğlu). Alternatively, it's easy to buy your ticket by credit card on Biletix's website and collect the tickets from either Biletix outlets or the venue before the performance.

A night out carousing to *fasıl* music is a must while you're in Istanbul. The best place to do this is at a *meyhane* – see p146.

Nightclubs

Istanbul has a killer nightlife. Sure, some of the DJs still spin bad mid-90s techno and spray-on-jeans are still fashion *de rigueur*, but the locals know how to have a bloody good time and the open-air club scene is second to none. The live-music scene is sensational as well – see p135 for festivals and right for local venues.

When İstanbullus go out clubbing they dress to kill. If you don't do the same, you'll be unlikely to get past the door bitches (usually buffed young hunks) at the mega venues on the Bosphorus.

As is the case with bars and restaurants, most of the clubbing action is in Beyoğlu or along the Bosphorus. Clubs are busiest on Friday, and especially Saturday nights, and the action doesn't really kick off until 1am.

Crystal (☎ 0212-229 7152; www.clubcrystal.org; Muallim Naci Caddesi 65, Ortaköy; Fri & Sat €17; ☎ 11pm-5.30am Fri & Sat) This is the second home to the city's house aficionados, who come here to zone in to sets by some of the best mixmasters from Turkey and the rest of Europe. Those in the know go to Reina (right) first, then come here to afterparty. Turn up before 2am at your peril. Both indoor and outdoor bars (super views) provide plenty of nooks for you and your new friend.

Indigo (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 1307; www.livingindigo.com in Turkish; Arkasu Sokak 1-5, Galatasaray; admission varies; ☎ midnight-5am Thu-Sat) A relatively new but very welcome addition to the live-electronic club circuit, Indigo's no-fuss charm has ensured it a permanent fixture in the diaries of all Beyoğlu clubbing darlings. Expect an eclectic music scene – rock, acid-jazz and electro-house – of local and international DJs. Lots of fun.

Reina (☎ 0212-259 5919; www.reina.com.tr; Muallim Naci Caddesi 44, Ortaköy; admission free Mon-Thu & Sun, €14 Fri & Sat; ☎ 7pm-3am) During the summer months some 4000 cashed-up beautiful people party hard here until the wee hours alongside spectacular views of the Bosphorus in this open-air megaclub-cum-entertainment complex-cum-eatery-cum-pickup-joint. The Reina is a good first port of call for those new to the Istanbul scene. Frock up or you won't get in.

Live Music

WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC & OPERA

Istanbul has a lively Western classical music scene. The İstanbul Symphonic Orchestra and the Borusan İstanbul Philharmonic Orchestra perform frequently and international ensembles are regulars in İstanbul too – check *Time Out İstanbul* and the website of **Biletix** (www.biletix.com) to see what's on.

The highlight of the year for classical devotees is undeniably the International İstanbul Music Festival (p135) in June. If you can time your visit for the festival don't miss the concerts held in the ancient Haghia Eirene (p111). Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, performed in Topkapı Palace, is unfortunately only really an option for German or Turkish speakers.

ROCK, ELECTRONIC, RAP & REGGAE

If you're European you've probably heard about İstanbul's burgeoning live-music scene. For the rest of us here's an introduction: in the last few years İstanbul has witnessed a creative renaissance in the arts arena that's seen new venues opening almost weekly and the sound of garage-band rehearsals almost a fact of life in Beyoğlu's streets. Check out *Crossing The Bridge – The Story of Music in İstanbul*, by Fatih Akin, and the monthly *Time Out İstanbul* to prime yourself.

It almost goes without saying that there's no need to dress up too much.

Babylon (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-292 7368; www.babylon.com.tr; Şehbender Sokak 3, Tünel; admission varies; ☎ 9.30pm-2am Tue-Thu, 10pm-3am Fri & Sat) Babylon is İstanbul's No 1 live venue: any international and local act worth listening to has played in its dark recesses. One night it's the DJ-spun 'Oldies but Goldies', so grab your spangled thong, the other it's Burhan Öçal with his blend of oriental-acid jazz. Every night it's a fun-loving Boho crowd. Buy tickets at the **box office** (☎ 11am-7pm, 7.30pm-start of event) opposite.

Roxy (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-249 1283; www.roxy.com.tr; Arslan Yatağı Sokak 7, Taksim; admission varies; ☎ 9pm-3am Wed & Thu, 10pm-4am Fri & Sat) Long-time, beloved haunt of an intoxicated grungy set, Roxy arm wrestles Babylon for the title of the city's best live-music club and usually is just pipped at the finish line. Come to Roxy for sweaty, crowd-surfing nights – forget glam frocks as nights here usually get messy. Expect anything from rap and hip-hop through to jazz fusion and electronic – and '80s on the weekends.

Kapak Rock Bar (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 4229; Sadri Alish Sokak 32, Beyoğlu; ☎ 4pm-4am) A newcomer on the scene, on the busiest nights (Friday and Saturday), you'll hear up-and-coming alternative rock bands on stage doing their thing; other nights are more like intimate jam sessions between the rockers on stage and their mates in the crowd – a very friendly scene. You can eat here too.

Balans Music Hall (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 7020; www.balansmusicall.com, in Turkish; Balo Sokak 22; Beyoğlu; admission €5.50-14; ☎ 9pm-4am Mon-Sat) This three-levelled space, with a great sound system, regularly hosts big and small-name local rock bands. It's a friendly, mixed crowd: join the crush up front to make friends fast.

JAZZ

Jazz Café (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 0516; www.jazzcafeistanbul.com, in Turkish; Hasnun Galip Sokak 20, Beyoğlu; admission free; ☎ 8pm-4am Tue-Sat) This old favourite is popular with a mix of mainly 30-something expats and locals. Expect laid-back jazz sessions with mostly local musos and occasionally the odd '80s disco thrown in. If you're a jazz purist you might want to look elsewhere. The live music starts at 10pm.

Nardis Jazz Club (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-244 6327; www.nardisjazz.com; Kuledibi Sokak 14, Galata; admission €9-13; ☎ music 10pm-1am Mon-Thu, 11pm-2am Fri & Sat) Just downhill from the Galata Tower, this venue is where the real aficionados go. Run by jazz guitarist Önder Focan, it's small and if you want a decent table you'll need to book. There's a great sound system, as you'd expect, and a restaurant too, but those in-the-know eat elsewhere. It hosts international acts.

Cinemas

İstiklal Caddesi, between Taksim and Galatasaray, is the heart of İstanbul's *sinema* (cinema) district, so you can simply cinema-hop until you find something you like. The only cinema close to Sultanahmet is the Şafak

Sinemaları at Çemberlitaş. Foreign films are mostly shown in English with Turkish subtitles, but double-check at the box office in case the film has *Türkçe* (Turkish) dubbing, which sometimes happens with blockbusters and children's films.

When possible, buy your tickets a few hours in advance. Depending on the venue, tickets cost €5 to €7 for adults, €3 or €4 for students – many places offer reduced rates on Wednesday.

City cinemas include:

- AFM Fitaş** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 2020; İstiklal Caddesi 24-26, Beyoğlu)
- Alkazar Sinema Merkezi** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 2466; İstiklal Caddesi 179, Beyoğlu)
- Atlas** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-252 8576; İstiklal Caddesi 209, Atlas Pasajı, Beyoğlu)
- Beyoğlu** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 3240; İstiklal Caddesi 140, Beyoğlu)
- Emek** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 8439; İstiklal Caddesi, Yeşilçam Sokak 5, Beyoğlu)
- İstanbul Modern Cinema** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-334 7300; www.istanbulmodern.org; Meclis-i Mebusan Caddesi, off Necatibey Caddesi, Beyoğlu) Excellent selection of arthouse movies.
- Rexx** (☎ 216-336 0112; Sakırgülü Sokak 20-22, Kadıköy)
- Şafak Sinemaları** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-516 2660; Divan Yolu 134, Çemberlitaş)
- Sinepop** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 1176; İstiklal Caddesi, Yeşilçam Sokak 22, Beyoğlu)

Folk Dance

There are a number of touristy 'Turkish Shows' around town providing a snapshot of Turkey's folk dances (with belly-dancing), usually accompanied by dinner. Beloved by package-tour operators, they are expensive and the food is usually mediocre at best. Still, if you are keen to see some folk dance while you're in town these places are usually the only ones you'll be able to do it. The two most popular are **Orient House** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0212-517 6163; www.orienthouseistanbul.com; Tiyatro Caddesi 27, Beyazıt; adult/child €70/35; ☎ 9pm-midnight) and **Sultana's** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-219 3904; www.sultanas-nights.com; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 16, Elmadag; €75; ☎ dinner 7.30pm, show 9pm, finish midnight).

Sport

There's only one spectator sport that really matters to Turks: football. Eighteen teams from all over Turkey compete from August to May. Each season three move up from the second division into the first and three get

demoted. The top team of the first division plays in the European Cup.

Matches are usually held on weekends, normally on a Saturday night. Almost any Turkish male will be able to tell you which is the best match to see. Tickets are sold at the clubhouses at the *stadyum* (stadium) or at **Biletix** (☎ 0216-556 9800; www.biletix.com) and usually go on sale between Tuesday and Thursday for a weekend game. For open seating you'll pay around €12; for covered seating – which has the best views – anywhere from €17 to €70. If you miss out on the tickets you can get them at the door of the stadium, but they are usually outrageously overpriced.

Some level of violence at games is a fact of life. It's not usually punch-ups or worse, but more likely to be breaking and throwing of seats or fierce fist-waving recriminations to the referee (who may be escorted off by riot police at the end of the game). Sadly, this seems to be seen as all part of the fun of football games and no-one thinks anything of it. It goes without saying that you can count the number of women at matches on one hand. If you're worried about violence, avoid the clashes of arch rivals, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe. Beşiktaş is another team with a large following.

SHOPPING

If you love shopping you've come to the right place. Despite İstanbul's big-ticket historic sights, many travellers come here and find the highlight of their visit was searching and bantering for treasures in the magnificent **Grand Bazaar** (p115). Come here for jewellery, leather, textiles, ceramics and trinkets. And if you're still standing after a serious session in the Grand Bazaar, İstanbul offers plenty of other opportunities to put your credit rating in jeopardy. **Arasta Bazaar** (p106), behind the Blue Mosque in Sultanahmet, is lined with an excellent range of carpet and ceramic shops – come to this minimum-hassle spot for a leisurely window-shop.

Tahtakale, the area between the Grand Bazaar and Eminönü, is the best place to fossick for good-value haberdashery, manchester, kitchen goods, and especially dried fruits, spices and lotions in the Spice Bazaar – locals say if you can't find it in Tahtakale it doesn't exist. Over in Beyoğlu, **İstiklal Caddesi** (p120) is lined with clothing, shoe, book and music shops; around the Tünel end you'll

find old books and prints. A few steps away is **Çukurcuma**, the city's best antique and curios district; on Sunday afternoons there's a flea market here.

Come energised, come with maximum overdraft, come with an empty suitcase.

Art & Antiques

Sofa (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-520 2850; Nuruosmaniye Caddesi 85, Çağaloğlu; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) As well as its eclectic range of prints, ceramics, calligraphy and Ottoman and Byzantine curios, Sofa sells contemporary Turkish art and books. The range of jewellery made out of antique Ottoman coins and 24-carat gold is extraordinarily beautiful, but an heirloom piece will start at €400. It's well worth coming in just to browse.

Artrium (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 4302; Tünel Geçidi 7, Tünel; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) This Aladdin's cave is crammed with antique ceramics, Ottoman miniatures, maps, prints and jewellery.

Galeri Alfa (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 1672; Faikpaşa Sokak 47, Çukurcuma; ☎ 11am-6pm) What makes this shop special is its range of charming, colourful toy Ottoman soldiers and court figures. It's worth popping in just to see them.

Nebil Basmacı (Map p116; ☎ 0212-520 9504; Halıcılar Caddesi 97, Grand Bazaar; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) One of myriad shops selling a mix of curios and carpets in the Grand Bazaar, Nebil Basmacı does a nice line in Russian icons, antique İznik tiles (from €40) and quality Anatolian carpets.

Şamdan (Candle; Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-245 4445; Altıpatlar Sokak 20, Çukurcuma; ☎ 11am-5.30pm) Located in the city's best antique and curio district, this small shop stocks quality antique furniture, china and glassware.

Carpets & Textiles

Cocoon (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-638 6271; www.cocoonr.com; Küçük Aya Sofya Caddesi 13, Sultanahmet; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm) There are so many rug and textile shops in İstanbul that isolating individual shops is usually incredibly difficult. We had no problem in singling this one out, though. Four floors of felt hats and antique costumes and textiles from Central Asia are artfully displayed next to rugs from Persia, Central Asia, the Caucasus and Anatolia. There's another, smaller shop in the nearby Arasta Bazaar.

EthniCon (Map p116; ☎ 0212-527 6841; Takkeçiler Sokak 58-60, Grand Bazaar; www.ethnicon.com; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat) One of the frontrunners in the contemporary kilim trend, EthniCon has a leading

TURKISH DELIGHT

You mustn't leave İstanbul without sampling its *lokum* (Turkish delight). The stuff you get here is the best in the world, and you can even buy it from the original shop of **Ali Muhiddin Hacı Bekir** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-522 0666; Hamidiye Caddesi 83; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat), inventor of the gorgeously gooey gloop. There's another store on İstiklal Caddesi in Beyoğlu (Map pp100-1) and one in Kadıköy.

The story goes that Ali Muhiddin came to İstanbul from the Black Sea mountain town of Kastamonu and established himself as a confectioner in the Ottoman capital in the late 18th century. Dissatisfaction with hard candies and traditional sweets led him to invent a new confection that would be easy to swallow, and he called his creation *rahat lokum*, the 'comfortable morsel'. *Lokum*, as it soon came to be called, was an immediate hit with the denizens of the imperial palace and soon the translucent jellied jewels had fans all over the country.

Ali Muhiddin elaborated on his original confection, as did his offspring (the shop, which was established in 1777, is still owned by his descendants); and now, as well as enjoying it *sade* (plain), you can buy *lokum* made with various fillings, including *cevizli* (walnut) and the classic *şam fıstıklı* (pistachio), or flavoured with *portakkallı* (orange), *bademli* (almond), *roze* (rose-water) or even crunchy coffee beans. You can also get a *çeşitli* (assortment).

range of patchwork kilims well matched to a modern home. You'll pay around €180 per metre here.

Haseki Hamam Carpet & Kilim Sales Store (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-638 0035; Haseki Hürrem Hamamı, Aya Sofya Meydanı 4; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun winter, 9am-6.30pm Tue-Sun summer) Located in the historic Baths of Lady Hürrem, this Ministry of Culture shop sells new carpets replicated from museum pieces. Although prices are fixed and clearly marked, you can get better deals elsewhere. However, this is a good place to come to get an idea of prices before you launch out into the carpet shops.

Muhlis Günbattı (Map p116; ☎ 0212-511 6562; Perdahçılar Sokak 48, Grand Bazaar; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) One of the most famous stores in the Grand Bazaar, Muhlis Günbattı specialises in *suzani* (needlework) fabrics from Uzbekistan. These spectacularly beautiful bedspreads and wall hangings are made from fine cotton embroidered with silk. They're commonly sold throughout İstanbul now, but the range and quality here is unbeatable. Quality bedspreads start from €300.

Sedir (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-458 4702; Mimar Mehmet Ağa Caddesi 39, Sultanahmet; ☎ 9am-10pm) There can't be too many rug shops in town with Byzantine mosaics in the basement but this one has just that. After looking through Sedir's excellent and affordable range of kilims, ask the friendly staff if you can have a peek at the mosaics and the sacred spring.

Şişko Osman (Fatty Osman; Map p116; ☎ 0212-528 3548; www.siskosman.com; Zincirli Han 15, Grand Bazaar;

☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) The Osmans have been in the rug business for four generations and their popularity has seen their original shop triple its size. The range and customer service here is certainly hard to beat.

Troy (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-458 0892; Arasta Bazaar 39, Sultanahmet; ☎ 9am-9pm) One of the many rug shops in the Arasta Bazaar, Troy is noteworthy for its quality stock and the delightful owner, whose shop seems to be filled with customers when all the others are empty. If you're after a hassle-free 'what-to-look-for-when-buying-a-carpet' primer, come here.

Yazi Hacı (Map p116; ☎ 0212-526 7748; Yağlıklar Caddesi 16, Grand Bazaar; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) Locals in-the-know come here when they want that special something. This den has wall-to-wall textiles with everything from hand-made scarfs, silk, satin, *suzani* to hand-painted bedspreads. Textile aficionados will think they've died and gone to heaven.

Handicrafts & Ceramics

İstanbul has no end of shops stocking a mixed range of handicrafts and ceramics, but we thought two are worth singling out – both are hassle-free and have the rare find of fixed and clearly marked prices.

Sönmez (Map pp96-7; Atmeydanı Sokak 19, Sultanahmet) Has a seemingly never-ending cavern of goodies.

Coşkun's bazaar (Map pp96-7; Soğukçeşme Sokak 20, Sultanahmet) Is owned by two charismatic brothers in an old house stuck to the side of the Topkapı Walls.

The following places are more specialist:

Chalcedon (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-527 6376; Caferiye Sokak 2, Sultanahmet; ☹ 9am-6pm) The azure chalcedony stone, mined in Eskişehir in western Anatolia, reputedly brings calm to its wearer. Used since ancient times in Anatolia, it was named after Chalcedon, modern-day Kadıköy. This small boutique offers the stone crafted into a very appealing range of jewellery. Come here if you want something a little different from what's on offer elsewhere.

Deli Kızın Yeri (Map p116; ☎ 0212-511 1914; Halıcılar Caddesi 42, Grand Bazaar; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Don't let the name – the Crazy Lady's Place – put you off. This is the spot to pick up something for so-and-so's new baby, with a good line of hand-made Turkish teddies and puppets on offer and even a cardboard 'Build Your Own' Aya Sofya. The best thing is that some of these goodies are made by village women on consignment. The Crazy Lady has another shop close by, but this one is better.

Istanbul Handicrafts Market (Map pp96-7; İstanbul Sanatlar Çarşısı; ☎ 0212-517 6782; Kabasakal Caddesi, Sultanahmet; ☹ 9am-6.30pm) Set in the small rooms surrounding the quiet, leafy courtyard of the 18th-century Cedid Mehmed Efendi Medresesi, this handicrafts centre is unusual in that local artisans work here and don't mind visitors watching them. This lovely oasis is a hassle-free place to purchase calligraphy, embroidery, glassware, miniature paintings, ceramics and costumed dolls.

Caferiye Medresesi (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-513 3601; Caferiye Sokak, Sultanahmet; ☹ 9am-6.30pm) Near Aya Sofya, it's similar to the handicrafts market, but also runs handicraft and music lessons (in Turkish only).

İznik Classics & Tiles (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-517 1705; Arasta Bazaar 67 & 73, Sultanahmet; ☹ 9am-8pm) Arguably the best selection of ceramics in the city, İznik Classics offers everything from superb hand-painted collector's items to very affordable, mass-produced, yet still lovely tiles, platters and vases. With two shops in Arasta Bazaar, another in the Grand Bazaar (Map p116) and a four-floored gallery in Sultanahmet, if you can't find it here you're not looking hard enough.

Homewares & Clothing

Azad Tekstil (Map p116; ☎ 0212-512 4202; Yağlıkçılar Caddesi 16, Grand Bazaar; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) If you're after simple but stylish 100% cotton bed spreads, tablecloths or *peştemals* (*hamam*

wraps, from €3) for arguably the best price and range in the city, this is the place for you. Double-bed spreads go for around €25.

Derviş (Map p116; ☎ 0212-514 4525; www.dervis.com; Keseciler Caddesi 33-35, Grand Bazaar; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Follow the delicious clove scent into Derviş, a stylish gem awash with clothing, shawls, towels and sheets. You'll find raw cotton and silk *peştemals*, and traditional Turkish dowry vests and engagement dresses. It's all quality stuff but it's aimed at travellers so you pay a premium – herbal soaps are €3.50, a *peştamal* is €15 and the throws start at €200. There's another shop in Halıcılar Cad.

Abdulla Natural Products (Map p116; ☎ 0212-522 9078; Halıcılar Caddesi 53, Grand Bazaar; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) On a similar vein to Derviş it's a hanky-sized shop specialising in quality cotton bed linen, silky goat-hair and sheepskin throws, and towels.

eviHAN (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-244 0034; Altıpatlar Sokak 8, Çukurcuma; ☹ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat) If you're after a special something you know no-one else will have back home look no further. The owner's range of quality, Ottoman-inspired, but contemporary funky clothing looks simply fantastic with a wristful of her handmade beads.

Leyla Seyhanlı (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 7410; Altıpatlar Sokak 10, Çukurcuma; ☹ 10am-7pm) If you love old clothes, you'll adore Leyla Seyhanlı's boutique. Filled to the brim with piles of Ottoman embroidery and outfits, it's a rummager's delight. There's no sign, but it's right next door to eviHAN.

Leather

Koç Deri (Map p116; ☎ 0212-527 5553; Kürkçüler Çarşısı 22-46, Grand Bazaar; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) If you fancy a leather jacket or coat, Koç is bound to have something that suits. It's one of the bazaar's busiest and longest-running stores.

Küçük Köşe (Little Corner; Map p116; ☎ 0212-513 0335; Kalpakçılar Caddesi 89-91, Grand Bazaar; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) If you've always wanted a Kelly or Birkin but can't afford Hermès, this place is for you. Its copies of the work of the big-gun designers are good quality and at around €200 they're a lot more affordable.

Music

Lale Plak (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-293 7739; Galipedede Caddesi 1, Tünel; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) This long-standing magnet for music aficionados is crammed with

CDs of jazz, Western and Turkish classical, plus Turkish folk and some electronica.

Mephisto (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-249 0687; İstiklal Caddesi 197, Beyoğlu; ☹ 9am-midnight) This is the spot to pick up Turkish pop, rap and hip-hop.

Old Books, Maps & Prints

Denizler Kitabevi (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-249 8893; İstiklal Caddesi 395; ☹ 9.30am-7.30pm) A charmingly eccentric shop specialising in old maps and books, it also stocks antique prints.

Ottomania (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-243 2157; Sofyalı Sokak 30-32, Tünel; ☹ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) An old map or print can be a great souvenir to bring home from İstanbul and with Ottomania's quality stock you won't have trouble sourcing one. Prices are clearly marked.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

All roads lead to İstanbul. As the country's foremost transport hub, the question is not so much how to get there but how to negotiate the sprawling urban mass when you arrive.

Air

İstanbul's main international airport is the **Atatürk International Airport** (Atatürk Hava Limanı; ☎ 0212-465 3000; www.dhmiata.gov.tr), 23km west of Sultanahmet. The international (*dış hatlar*) and domestic terminals (*iç hatlar*) are side by side. Check the website for flight arrivals and departure times.

There are car hire desks, money-exchange offices, a pharmacy, ATMs and a PTT in the international arrivals area. There's also a **tourist information desk** (☹ 24hr) that supplies a very limited range of maps, advice and brochures. The **left-luggage service** (per suitcase per 24hr €5; ☹ 24hr) is to your left as you exit customs.

For domestic flights it's a good idea to arrive at least an hour before your departure time, especially on weekends and during public holidays, as check-in and security queues can be long.

One of the few annoying things about the airport is that travellers must pay €0.55 to use a baggage trolley. You must pay in Turkish liras, euros or US dollars; fortunately, attendants give change.

İstanbul also has a smaller airport, **Sabiha Gökçen International Airport** (SAW; ☎ 0216-585 5000; www.sgairport.com), some 50km east of Sultanahmet, on the Asian side of the city. It's increasingly popular for cheap flights from Europe, particularly Germany.

INTERNATIONAL AIRLINE OFFICES

Aeroflot (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-296 6725; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 26, Taksim)

Air France Taksim (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-310 1919; Emirhan Caddesi 145/4, Dikilitaş); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 5491)

Azerbaijan Airlines (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-296 3530; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 30, Harbiye)

British Airways 4 Levent (☎ 0212-317 6600; Büyükdere Caddesi 209/17, Tekfen Tower); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 5682)

Corendon Airlines (☎ 0216-658 7250)

Cyprus Turkish Airlines Mecidiyeköy (☎ 0212-274 6932; Büyükdere Caddesi 56) Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 3597)

Emirates Airlines Gümüşsuyu (☎ 0212-334 8888; İnönü Caddesi 96); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 5814)

Fly Air (☎ 0212-444 4359)

German Wings (☎ 0212-354 6666 call centre only)

Iran Air (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-225 0256; Vali Konağı Caddesi 17, Harbiye)

Japan Airlines Elmadağ (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-233 0840; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 107/2)

Lufthansa (☎ 0212-315 3434 call centre only)

Olympic Airways Elmadağ (Map pp94-5;

☎ 0212-296 7575; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 171/A); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 3388)

Onur Air Elmadağ (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-233 3800; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 141/147); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-663 0685)

Pegasus Airlines (☎ 0212-697 7777 call centre only)

Singapore Airlines Harbiye (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-232 3706; Halaskargazi Caddesi 113); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 3473)

Most of the city's airline offices are along Cumhuriyet Caddesi between Taksim Sq and Harbiye, but Turkish Airlines has offices around the city. Travel agencies can also sell tickets and make reservations for most airlines.

For details of international flights to and from İstanbul, see p671. For information on flights from İstanbul to other Turkish cities, see p679.

Boat

KARAKÖY

Cruise ships arrive at the **Karaköy International Maritime Passenger Terminal** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-249 5776) just near the Galata Bridge.

YENİKAPI

Yenikapi (Map pp98-9) is the dock for the **İDO** (Istanbul Deniz Otobüsleri; www.ido.com.tr) fast ferries across the Sea of Marmara to Yalova (for Bursa) and Bandırma (for İzmir). A new fast ferry line is planned to run between Yenikapi and Mudanya (for Bursa). For more details on services to Yalova see p287, and for Bandırma, see p202.

İDO also operates a commuter ferry between Istanbul (Bostancı) and Mudanya (near Bursa).

KABATAŞ

İDO ferries run services from Kabataş to Yalova (for Bursa).

Bus**BUS STATIONS**

The **International Istanbul Bus Station** (Uluslararası İstanbul Otogarı; Map p93; ☎ 0212-658 0505) is the city's main bus station for both intercity and international routes. Called simply the 'otogar', it's in the western district of Esenler, about 10km northwest of Sultanahmet.

The easiest way to get to the otogar is to catch the tram from Sultanahmet to Aksaray and then connect with the Light Rail Transit (LRT) service which stops at the otogar on its way to the airport – all up a half-hour trip. If you're coming from Taksim or Beyoğlu, bus No 830 leaves about every 20 minutes from around 6.30am to 8.40pm from Taksim Sq, taking about an hour to reach the centre of the otogar. Many bus companies run a free *servis* (shuttle bus) between the otogar and Taksim Sq or Sultanahmet. Ask if there's a *servis* when you buy your ticket or when you arrive at the otogar. A taxi from Sultanahmet to the otogar will cost around €12 (20 minutes); from Taksim Sq around €15 (30 minutes).

The otogar is a monster of a place, with over 150 ticket offices all touting for business. Buses leave from here for virtually everywhere in Turkey and for countries including Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Romania and Syria. For details of international bus services, see p673 to p677.

Excluding holiday periods, you can usually come to the otogar, spend 30 minutes comparing prices and departure times and be on your way within the hour. There's no easy way to find the best fare; you have to go from one office to another asking prices and inspecting the buses parked around the back.

If you plan to leave sooner rather than later, make sure you ask about departure times as well as fares. Touts will be happy to sell you a cheap fare on a bus leaving in four hours' time, but in the meantime several buses from other companies offering similar rates could have seen you on your way.

There is a much smaller bus station on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus at **Harem** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0216-333 3763), south of Üsküdar and north of Haydarpaşa Train Station. If you're arriving in Istanbul by bus from anywhere in Anatolia (the Asian side of Turkey) it's always quicker to get out at Harem and take the car ferry to Sirkeci (ferry from 7am, then every half-hour until 9.30pm daily). If you stay on the bus until the otogar, you'll add at least an hour to your journey (and then you'll still have to travel into town).

SERVICES FROM İSTANBUL'S OTOGAR

Destination	Fare	Duration	Distance
Alanya	€40	16hr	860km
Ankara	€18-26	5-5½hr	450km
Antakya	€22 (day) €25 (night)	18hr	1115km
Antalya	€36	12½hr	740km
Bodrum	€35-40	12½hr	860km
Bursa	€9	4hr	230km
Çanakkale	€9-14	6hr	340km
Denizli (for Pamukkale)	€20-23	12hr	665km
Edirne	€9	2½hr	235km
Fethiye	€40	12hr	820km
Göreme	€18-22	11hr	725km
İzmir	€22-30	8hr	575km
Kaş	€28	12hr	1090km
Konya	€20	10hr	660km
Kuşadası	€37	9hr	555km
Marmaris	€35-40	12½hr	805km
Trabzon	€35	24hr	970km

BUS COMPANIES

The top national lines, offering premium service at marginally higher prices, are:

Kamil Koç Otogar (☎ 444 0567 country-wide; www.kamilkoc.com.tr, in Turkish; ticket office No 144-6) Beyoğlu ticket office (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-252 7223; İnönü Caddesi 31)

Ulusoy Otogar (☎ 444 1888 country-wide; www.ulusoy.com.tr; ticket office No 128) Beyoğlu ticket office (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-244 6375; İnönü Caddesi 59)

Varan Turizm Otogar (☎ 444 8999 country-wide; www.varan.com.tr; ticket office No 16) Beyoğlu ticket office (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0212-251 7474; İnönü Caddesi 29/B)

Car & Motorcycle

The E80 Trans-European Motorway (TEM) from Europe passes about 10km north of Atatürk International Airport, then as Hwy 02 takes the Fatih Bridge across the Bosphorus to Asia, passing some 1.5km north of the Sabiha Gökçen International Airport. This will be your main route for getting to and from Istanbul, but try to avoid rush hours (7am to 10am and 3pm to 7pm Monday to Saturday) as the traffic is nightmarish and the Bosphorus bridges come to a standstill.

Don't plan to use your car in Istanbul; park it for the duration of your stay (p160). If you want to hire a car for your travels, we recommend you hire it from either of the airports on your way *out* of Istanbul. This will mean lugging your baggage by taxi or public transport to the airport, but it won't mean navigating Istanbul's manic roads in an unfamiliar vehicle – you'll be comfortably on your way out of the city before you even get behind the wheel. Alternatively, you could catch public transport to your next destination, and then rent.

Recommended car rental agencies include:

Avis Taksim (☎ 0212-297 9610; www.avis.com.tr; Abdülhak Hamit Caddesi 84) Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 3455; ☎ 24hrs) Sabiha Gökçen International Airport (☎ 0216-585 5154; ☎ 9am-7pm)

Hertz Taksim (☎ 0212-225 6404; www.hertz.com.tr; Yedikuyular Caddesi 4) Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 5999; ☎ 24hrs) Sabiha Gökçen International Airport (☎ 0216-349 3040; ☎ 9am-7pm)

National Taksim (☎ 0212-254 7719; www.nationalcar.com; Şehit Muhtar Mahallesi, Aydede Sokak 1/2) Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 3546; ☎ noon-midnight)

Train

At the time of writing, all trains from Europe were terminating at **Sirkeci Train Station** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0212-527 0051). Outside the station's main door there's a convenient tram that runs up the hill to Sultanahmet or the other way over the Golden Horn to Kabataş, from where you can travel by funicular rail up to Taksim Sq. Note, that after the Marmaray project is finished (see p159), Sirkeci station will become a museum and trains will terminate at Yenikapi.

Trains from the Asian side of Turkey and from countries east and south terminate at **Haydarpaşa Train Station** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0216-336 4470), on the Asian shore close to Kadıköy. Ignore anyone who suggests you should take a taxi to or from Haydarpaşa. The ferry between Eminönü and Haydarpaşa/Kadıköy is cheap and speedy; taxis across the Bosphorus always get stuck in traffic. Haydarpaşa has an *emanet* (left-luggage room), a restaurant serving alcoholic beverages, numerous snack shops, bank ATMs and a small PTT. Tickets for trains leaving from Haydarpaşa Train Station can also be purchased from Sirkeci Train Station. Note that as part of the Marmaray project (see p159), Haydarpaşa Train Station will close

MAIN TRAIN SERVICES TO/FROM İSTANBUL**From Sirkeci Train Station**

All the following services are express trains. The fares quoted are for a bunk in a sleeper.

Destination	Train	Fare	Frequency	Departs	Arrives	Duration
From İstanbul						
Belgrade	<i>Bosphorus/Balkan</i>	from €58	daily	10pm	8.18pm	22hr
Bucharest	<i>Bosphorus/Balkan</i>	from €48	daily	10pm	5.30pm	19½hr
Budapest	<i>Bosphorus/Balkan</i>	from €81	daily	10pm	10.12am	36hr
Salonika	<i>Dostluk/Filia</i>	from €48	daily	8pm	7.54am	12hr
Sofia	<i>Bosphorus/Balkan</i>	from €26	daily	10pm	11.39am	13½hr

To İstanbul

From Belgrade	<i>Bosphorus/Balkan</i>	from €58	daily	8.40am	8.25am	22hr
From Bucharest	<i>Bosphorus/Balkan</i>	from €48	daily	2.10pm	8.25am	19½hr
From Budapest	<i>Bosphorus/Balkan</i>	from €81	daily	7.15pm	8.25am	36hr
From Salonika	<i>Dostluk/Filias</i>	from €48	daily	8pm	7.45am	12hr
From Sofia	<i>Bosphorus/Balkan</i>	from €26	daily	6.30pm	8.25am	13½hr

MAIN TRAIN SERVICES TO/FROM İSTANBUL *Continued***From Haydarpaşa Train Station**

Other trains not in the table that originate in Istanbul include: *Doğu Ekspresi* (Kars via Ankara, Sivas, Erzurum); *Güney Ekspresi* (Diyarbakır via Ankara, Kayseri, Sivas, Malatya), *İç Anadolu Mavi* (Adana via Konya), *Pamukkale Ekspresi* (Denizli via Eğirdir).

There are a number of services between Istanbul and Ankara; only two are shown below.

Destination	Train	Fare	Frequency	Departs	Arrives	Duration
From İstanbul						
Aleppo	<i>Toros</i>	€25 (sleeper)	Thu	8.55am	2.34pm	29hr (via Gaziantep, Adana, Konya, Eskişehir)
Ankara (day)	<i>Baskent</i>	€12 (pullman chairs only)	daily	10am	4.30pm	6½hr
Ankara (night)		€36/25 (1st-/2nd-class sleeper)	daily	10.30pm	8.04am	9½hr (via Eskişehir)
Kayseri	<i>Vangözü</i>	€19/40/34 (pullman/1st-/2nd-class sleeper)	Mon & Fri	8.05pm	2.48pm	19hr (via Ankara)
Konya	<i>Meram</i>	€20/56/45 (pullman/1st-/2nd-class sleeper)	daily	7.20pm	8.21am	13hr (via Afyon)
Tatvan	<i>Vangözü</i>	€35/71/60 (pullman/1st-/2nd class sleeper)	Mon & Fri	8.05pm	1.09pm	41hr (via Ankara, Kayseri, Malatya)
Tehran	<i>Trans-Asya</i>	€38 (couchette)	Wed	10.55pm	6.45pm	66hr (via Ankara, Kayseri, Van)

To İstanbul

See above for details of major stops along the way.

From Aleppo	<i>Toros</i>	€25 (sleeper)	Tue	11.05am	5.55pm	29hr
From Ankara (day)	<i>Baskent</i>	€12 (pullman only)	daily	10.20am	4.50pm	6½hr
From Ankara (night)		€36/25 (1st-/2nd-class sleeper)	daily	10.30pm	8am	9½hr
From Kayseri	<i>Vangözü</i>	€19/40/34 (pullman/1st-/2nd-class sleeper)	Wed & Fri	4.40am	11pm	19hr
From Konya	<i>Meram</i>	€20/56/45 (pullman/1st-/2nd-class sleeper)	daily	5.50pm	6.30am	13hr
From Tatvan	<i>Vangözü</i>	€35/71/60 (pullman/1st-/2nd-class sleeper)	Tue & Thu	7.20am	11pm	41hr
From Tehran	<i>Trans-Asya</i>	€38 (couchette)	Thu	8.15pm	3.45pm	69hr

and trains are proposed to depart from a new station to be built in Üsküdar.

The national rail system has received a much-needed injection of funds and fast-rail projects that are on the drawing board may be running by the time you read this. See p684 for more information.

GETTING AROUND

Moving 16 million people around İstanbul is a challenge but the government has begun to implement ambitious projects aimed to ease the city's horrendous traffic problems. The Marmaray project (see opposite) is planned to bring İstanbul world-class public transport.

THREE CHEERS FOR MARMARAY

Marmaray (www.marmaray.com) is an ambitious public transport project aimed to relieve İstanbul's woeful traffic congestion. Plans show the rail line, which presently follows the coast to Yeşilköy near the airport, going underground at Yedikule, travelling to underground stations at Yenikapı and Sirkeci. From Sirkeci it will travel some 5km under the Bosphorus to another underground station on the Asian side at Üsküdar, before finally coming to ground level some 2km east of Kadıköy.

The project is slated to be completed by 2010, but the deadline is looking increasingly shaky. Old İstanbul is built on layers upon layers of history. No sooner had workmen commenced digging when they found an ancient port and bazaar in Üsküdar, and a 4th-century Byzantine harbour in Yenikapı. Diggers were replaced by brushes, and archaeologists got to work.

Other issues such as the safety of this tunnel being so close to the North Anatolian fault line leave many nervous, though authorities assure state-of-the-art technology will keep commuters safe.

To/From the Airports**ATATÜRK INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

Getting from the airport to Sultanahmet by public transport is cheap and easy. There are a couple of options, but the most convenient and quickest is to take the LRT service from the airport six stops to Zeytinburnu (€0.60), from where you connect with the tram that takes you directly to Sultanahmet – the whole trip takes about 50 minutes. The airport station is on the lower ground floor beneath the international arrivals hall – follow the 'Hafif Metro – Light Rail System' signs down the escalators and right to the station. Services depart every 10 minutes or so from 6am until 12.40am.

Most hotels and hostels in Sultanahmet book minibus transport from the hotels to the airport for €4 a head. Unfortunately, this option only works going *from* town to the airport and not vice versa. Buses leave at 3.30am, 5.30am, 7.30am, 11am, 1pm, 3pm, 4.30pm and 9pm. Reserve your seat in advance and allow lots of time for the trip as the minibus may spend up to an hour collecting all its

passengers before heading out to the airport (30 to 45 minutes).

If you are staying near Taksim Sq, the **Havaş airport bus** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 444 0487; €5) is the easiest option. This departs from outside the arrivals hall, then goes to Yenikapı (30 minutes) and on to the Havaş ticket office on Cumhuriyet Caddesi just off Taksim Sq (45 to 60 minutes). Buses leave the airport at 5am, 6am and then every 30 minutes until 11pm; going from Taksim Sq to the airport, buses depart daily at 5am, 6am and then every 30 minutes until 1am. Alternatively, you could take the LRT all the way to Aksaray (€0.60), and catch Bus 83MT (€0.60) which runs direct to Taksim Sq.

A taxi between the Atatürk International Airport and Sultanahmet or Taksim Sq costs between €12 and €15, more between midnight and 6am or if there's heavy traffic.

SABIHA GÖKÇEN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Some 50km east of Sultanahmet and Taksim Sq, **Sabiha Gökçen International Airport** (www.sgairport.com) is a lot less convenient to get to than Atatürk International Airport – no matter which mode of transport you take, it's at least an hour-long trip.

There is limited public transportation to/from the airport. You can catch a seabus to Bostancı, and then a connecting privately run bus (☎ 0212-465 7975 for info) to the airport. At least six ferries daily run from Eminönü and Karaköy to Bostancı; see www.ido.com.tr for timetable information. At least 11 buses run from Bostancı to the airport from 4.30am to 6.30pm (with extra services at 9pm and 10.45pm Friday to Monday). Tickets for the bus cost €3.

A much more convenient option is to ring your airline and find out about its transfer arrangements. Many airlines provide a transfer bus, timed to connect with flights, between Sultanahmet or Taksim Sq and the airport from €5 to €11 per person. Alternatively, you could catch the **Havaş airport bus** (☎ 444 0487; €5), with departures timed to connect with Turkish Airlines flights. These buses run from the airport via the Harem bus station (Map pp94-5) to the Kozyatağı Havaş office (Atatürk Caddesi 22, Kozyatağı), near Kadıköy ferry dock. Going to the airport, the buses leave the Kozyatağı Havaş office at 4am, running every hour until 10am; then from 1pm buses run hourly until 9pm. The final bus is at 11pm.

Most hotels and hostels in Sultanahmet book minibus transport from the hotels to Sabiha Gökçen for €15 a head, but there's only one departure daily, at 12.30am.

A taxi between Sabiha Gökçen International Airport and Sultanahmet or Taksim Sq costs around €45, more between midnight and 6am or if there's heavy traffic.

Boat

The most enjoyable and efficient way to get around town is by ferry. **İstanbul Deniz Otobüsleri** (☎ 0212-444 4436; www.ido.com.tr) has timetable information or you can pick up a printed timetable at any of the ferry docks. *Jetons* (transport tokens) cost €0.60 and it's possible to use Akbil (opposite) on all routes.

The main ferry docks are at the mouth of the Golden Horn (Eminönü, Sirkeci and Karaköy) and at Kabataş, 2km northeast of the Galata Bridge, just south of Dolmabahçe Palace. Ferries travel many routes around the city, but the routes commonly used by travellers include:

Beşiktaş–Kadıköy (every half-hour from 7.15am–10.45pm) Eminönü–Anadolu Kavağı (Boğaziçi Özel Gezi; Bosphorus Excursions Ferry; once or twice a day)

Eminönü–Haydarpaşa and Kadıköy (approximately every 20 minutes from 7am–8pm)

Eminönü–Üsküdar (approximately every 20 minutes from 6.35am–11pm)

Kabataş–Üsküdar (around every half-hour from 7am–9.30am & 4.30–8pm)

Karaköy–Kadıköy and Haydarpaşa (approximately every 20 minutes from 6.15am–11pm)

Sirkeci–Harem (daily car ferry from 7am, then every half-hour until 9.30pm)

Sirkeci–Kadıköy–Kınalıada–Burgazada–Heybeliada–Büyükdada (Princes' Islands ferry; at least eight ferries a day)

Üsküdar–Karaköy–Eminönü–Kasımpaşa–Fener-Balat–Ayvansaray–Sütlüce–Eyüp (approximately every hour, from 7.30am to 7.45pm)

There are also seabus services, which are more expensive but faster than ferries. One useful route is Bostancı–Karaköy–Eminönü, which has at least six services a day from 7.15am to 5pm).

For more information check with İstanbul Deniz Otobüsleri.

Bus

İstanbul's bus system is extremely efficient. The major bus stations are at Taksim Sq,

Beşiktaş, Aksaray, Rüstempaşa-Eminönü, Kadıköy and Üsküdar. Most services run between 6.30am and 11.30pm. Destinations and main stops on city bus routes are shown on a sign on the kerbside of the *otobüs* (bus) or on the electronic display at its front.

İETT (www.iett.gov.tr) buses are run by the city and you must have a ticket (€0.65) before boarding. You can buy tickets from the white booths near major stops or from some nearby shops for a small mark-up (look for 'İETT otobüs bileti satılır' signs). Think about stocking up a supply to last throughout your stay in the city or buying an Akbil (see opposite). Blue private buses regulated by the city called *Özel Halk Otobüsü* run the same routes; these accept cash (pay the conductor) and Akbil.

The most useful bus for travellers is the T4 bus that runs between Sultanahmet and Taksim Sq. It leaves from Sultanahmet Meydanı, near the Sultanahmet tourist information office, and stops at Karaköy and near Dolmabahçe en route to Taksim – all up usually a half-hour trip. If you're getting on at Sultanahmet Meydanı you can buy tickets from the newspaper booth close by.

Car & Motorcycle

Driving in İstanbul is a nightmare: constant traffic jams, careless drivers, traffic lanes habitually ignored, thin streets choked with parked cars – and you're expected to be able to turn on a postage stamp. Put simply, we recommend you park your car and use İstanbul's cheap and efficient public-transport system instead.

Top-end and a handful of midrange hotels offer undercover parking for guests, and most midrange and budget options have a street-side park or two that is nominally theirs to use. However other parking near your accommodation is easy to find.

There are few undercover long-term car parks in the city. Instead, car parking is dotted all over the city in empty blocks overseen by a caretaker, or roadside, in which case it'll be free or you'll be required to pay an hourly rate to a fee collector. There is no fixed system: one street can be free; turn the corner and a fee collector will be waiting. There are also no street signs to tell you where parking lots are. Your best bet is to ring your accommodation and, upon arrival, ask them to point out the nearest and/or cheapest option. Negotiate a rate for the duration of your stay. Expect to pay around €6 for a 24-hour period.

If you balk at the thought of even driving into the city to park, consider parking at Atatürk International Airport, and catching public transport or a taxi into the city to your accommodation. Parking costs €30 for four days, €45 per week. See the website www.ataturkairport.com for more information. You can also park at Sabiha Gökçen International Airport.

Dolmuş

İstanbul dolmuşes are minibuses running on defined routes at a set price. As a short-term visitor to the city, you won't have much, if any, cause to use them.

Funicular Railway

The Tünel was built in the late 19th-century to save passengers the steep walk from Karaköy up the hill to İstiklal Caddesi in Beyoğlu. The service still runs today from 7am to 9pm Monday to Friday (from 7.30am on weekends), every five or 10 minutes and the fare is €0.50.

Another funicular railway runs through a tunnel from the Bosphorus shore at Kabataş, where it connects with the tram, up the hill to the metro station at Taksim Sq. Services run around every three minutes for €0.65.

Light Rail Transit (LRT)

An LRT service connects Aksaray with the airport, stopping at 16 stations including the otogar along the way. Services depart every 10 minutes or so from 6am until 12.40am and cost €0.65, no matter how many stops you travel. In line with the Marmaray project (see p159) there are plans to extend this service to Yenikapı.

Metro

İstanbul's underground metro system runs north from Taksim Sq, stopping at Osmanbey, Şişli-Mecidiyeköy, Gayrettepe, Levent and Levent 4. Plans are on the drawing board to extend this north to Ayazağa. Services run every five minutes or so from 6.15am to 12.30am (€0.65).

Taxi

İstanbul is full of yellow taxis. A base rate is levied during the *gündüz* (daytime); the *gece* (night-time) rate, from midnight to 6am, is 50% higher. Meters, with LCD displays, flash 'gündüz' or 'gece' when they're started. Oc-

asionally, drivers try to put the *gece* rate on during the day, so watch out.

Taxi rates are very reasonable, from Sultanahmet to Taksim Sq should cost around €5; ignore any taxi driver who insists on a fixed rate as these are invariably much higher than you'd pay using the meter. Double check the money you give the driver too: drivers have been known to insist they were given a 5YTL note for payment, when they were really given 20YTL.

Few of the city's taxis have seatbelts. If you catch a taxi over either of the Bosphorus bridges it is your responsibility to cover the toll. The driver will add this to your fare.

As far as tipping goes, locals usually round up the fare to the nearest 0.5YTL.

Train

İstanbul has two *banliyö treni* (suburban train lines). The first rattles along the Sea of Marmara shore from Sirkeci Train Station, around Seraglio Point to Cankurtaran (Sultanahmet), Kumkapı, Yenikapı and a number of stations before terminating past Atatürk International Airport at Halkala. The second runs from Haydarpaşa Train Station to Gebze via Bostancı. The trains are a bit decrepit,

AKBİL

If you're staying in the city for more than a day or so you should consider getting yourself an Akbil, a computerised debit fare tag, which will save you time and money when hopping on and off trams, trains, ferries and buses all around the city. Akbil tags are available at the Akbil Gişesi booths at Sirkeci, Eminönü, Aksaray or Taksim Sq bus stands for a €3 deposit. When you have your tag, you can charge it with any amount from €3 at any Akbil booth or at machines at the Tünel or metro stations. Press the card's metal button into the fare machine on a bus, ferry, Light Rail Transit (LRT), train, tram or funicular and – beep – the fare is automatically deducted from your line of credit. It's perfectly acceptable if one person in a group buys an Akbil and presses it the appropriate number of times when everyone boards together. Akbil fares are 10% lower than cash or ticket fares. You'll get your deposit back when you return the device.

but are reliable (nearly every half-hour) and cheap (€0.65).

Note that after the Marmaray project (p159) is completed, both these train lines will be slightly shortened.

Tram

A tram runs from Kabataş (where the tram connects with a funicular to Taksim Sq), crossing the Golden Horn to Eminönü and Sirkeci, and then on to Sultanahmet, and along Divan Yolu to Çemberlitaş, Beyazıt (for the Grand Bazaar) and Aksaray (to connect to the otogar), then out through the city walls to Zeytinburnu (to connect with the airport). Trams run every five minutes or so from 6am to midnight (€0.65). Works are currently under way to extend the line in both directions. The most useful of these extensions for travellers will be past Kabataş to Beşiktaş, passing Dolmabahçe Palace along the way.

A quaint antique tram rattles its way up and down İstiklal Caddesi in Beyoğlu every day, beginning its journey just outside the Tünel station and travelling to Taksim Sq. Tickets aren't available on board – you must use an Akbil or purchase a ticket (€0.65) from the Tünel station.

AROUND İSTANBUL

If you're staying in İstanbul for a while you may want to consider taking a day trip to the Princes' Islands, a peaceful antidote to the hustle and bustle of the big city.

PRINCES' ISLANDS

☎ 0216

Most İstanbullular refer to the Princes' Islands as 'The Islands' (Adalar). They lie about 20km southeast of the city in the Sea of Marmara and make a great destination for a day's escape.

In Byzantine times, refractory princes, deposed monarchs and others who had outlived their roles were interned on the islands (rather like Abdullah Öcalan, the ex-PKK leader, marooned today on İmralı Island in the Sea of Marmara). A ferry service from İstanbul was started in the mid-19th century and the islands became popular summer resorts with Pera's Greek, Jewish and Armenian business communities. Many of the fine Victorian villas built by these wealthy merchants survive today.

A few minutes after landing you'll realise the Princes' Islands' big surprise: there are no cars! Except for the necessary police, fire and sanitation vehicles, transport is by bicycle, horse-drawn carriage and foot, as in centuries past. After the hustle and bustle of İstanbul, this comes as a very pleasant change.

All of the islands are extremely busy in summer, particularly on weekends, so we recommend avoiding a Sunday visit. If you wish to stay overnight during the summer months it is imperative that you book ahead. Many of the hotels are closed during the winter.

There are nine islands in the Princes' Islands group, only five of them populated. The ferry stops at four of these; the fifth, Sedef, has only recently attracted a resident population. Year-round there are 20,000 permanent residents scattered across the five, but numbers swell to 120,000 during the summer months when İstanbullular – many of whom have holiday homes on the islands – come here to escape the city heat.

The ferry's first stop is **Kınalıada** (a favourite holiday spot for İstanbul's Armenian population), which is sprinkled with low-rise apartments, all sporting red tiled roofs and oriented towards the water. The island has a few pebble beaches, a modernist mosque and an Armenian church to the left of the ferry station. The second stop, **Burgazada**, has always been favoured by İstanbullular of Greek heritage. Sights include a hilltop chapel, mosques, a synagogue, a handful of restaurants and the home of the late writer Sait Faik, now a modest **museum**. While Kınalıada offers little reward for the trouble of getting off the ferry, Burgazada is worth considering if you want to escape all crowds.

In contrast, the charming island of **Heybeliada** (Heybeli for short) has much to offer the visitor. Home to the Turkish Naval Academy (you'll see it to the left of the ferry dock), it has several restaurants and a thriving shopping strip with bakeries and delicatessens selling picnic provisions to day-trippers, who come here on weekends to walk in the pine groves and swim from the tiny (but crowded) beaches. The island's major landmark is the hilltop **Haghia Triada Monastery**. Perched above a picturesque line of poplar trees, the monastery functioned as a Greek Orthodox school of theology where priests were trained until 1974, when it was closed on the government's orders. The Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarch

chate in Fener has applied for permission to reopen the school.

Heybeliada has a couple of hotels, including the Merit Halkı Palace (right), which is perched at the top of Rafah Şehitleri Caddesi and commands wonderful views over the water. The absolutely delightful walk up to this hotel passes a few antique shops and a host of large wooden villas set in lovingly tended gardens. There are many lanes and streets leading to picnic spots and lookout points off the upper reaches of this street. To do this walk, turn right as you leave the ferry and make your way past the waterfront restaurants and cafés to the plaza with a central newsstand. From here walk up İşgüzar Sokak, veering right until you hit Rafah Şehitleri Caddesi.

If you don't feel like a walk (this one's uphill but not too steep), you can hire a bicycle from one of the shops in the main street (€3 per hour) or a *fayton* (horse-drawn carriage) to take you on a tour of the island. A 25-minute tour (*küçük tur*) costs €10, a one-hour tour (*büyük tur*) €15. Some visitors choose to spend the day by the **pool** (weekdays/weekends €17/25) at the Merit Halkı Palace, but most locals swim at the beaches around the island, though it pays to check the cleanliness of the water before you join them.

The largest island in the group, **Büyükada** (the 'Great Island'), shows an impressive face to visitors arriving on the ferry, with gingerbread villas climbing up the slopes of the hill and the bulbous twin cupolas of the Splendid Otel (right) providing an unmistakable landmark.

The **ferry terminal** is a lovely Ottoman-style kiosk. Inside there's a pleasant tile-decorated café with an outdoor terrace, as well as a **tourist information office** (☎ 10am-4pm) staffed by volunteers. There are eateries serving fresh fish to the left of the ferry terminal, next to an ATM.

The island's main tourist attraction is the Greek **Monastery of St George**, in the saddle between Büyükada's two highest hills. To get here, walk from the ferry straight ahead to the clock tower in İskele Meydanı (Dock Sq). The shopping district (with cheap eateries) is to the left along Recep Koç Sokak. Bear right onto 23 Nisan Caddesi, from where you can head along Kadiyoran Caddesi up the hill to the monastery. The enjoyable walk, which takes at least 50 minutes, takes you past a

long progression of impressive wooden villas set in gardens. After 30 minutes or so you will reach a reserve called 'Luna Park' by the locals. The monastery is a 20-minute walk up an extremely steep hill from here; some visitors prefer to hire a donkey to take them up the hill and back down again (€6.50). As you ascend you will see hundreds of pieces of cloth tied onto the branches of trees along the path – each represents a prayer, mostly offered by female supplicants who are visiting the monastery to pray for a child.

When you reach the monastery, there's not a lot to see. A small and gaudy church is the only building of note, but there are fabulous panoramic views from the terrace, as well as a small restaurant (see p164). From here it's possible to see all the way to İstanbul, as well as over to the nearby islands of Yassiada and Sivriada.

Bicycles are available for rent in several of the town's shops, and shops on the market street can provide picnic supplies, although food is cheaper on the mainland.

Just off the clock tower square there is a *fayton* stand. Hire one for a long tour of town, the hills and shore (one hour, €15) or a shorter tour of the town only (€10). It costs €6 to be taken to Luna Park. A shop just near the *fayton* stand hires out bicycles for €3 per hour.

Sleeping & Eating

HEYBELIADA

Halki Prenset Pansiyon (☎ 351 0039; www.halkiprenset.com in Turkish; Ayyıldız Caddesi 40-42; r Sun-Thu €40, Fri & Sat €50) Its friendly and welcoming, which is just as well since the rooms are uninspiring and frankly overpriced for what they offer. Stay here if you can't get a room somewhere else.

Merit Halkı Palace (☎ 351 0025; www.merithotels.com; Refah Şehitleri Caddesi 94; s/d Sun-Thu €65/85, s/d Fri & Sat €80/100; ☎ ☎) This comfortable hotel is a popular spot for a weekend break for İstanbullular. The pool area is particularly impressive and the restaurant serves meals and drinks (mains €13 to €17, beer €3) on its poolside terrace.

Başak Et Balık Restaurant (☎ 351 1289; Ayyıldız Caddesi 26; mezés €3-4.50, fish €4.50-8.50) One of a string of carbon-copy eateries along the shorefront, but it's always popular.

BÜYÜKADA

Splendid Otel (☎ 382 6950; www.splendidhotel.net; Nisan Caddesi 23; s/d €50/85; ☎) This atmospheric,

landmark building is indeed splendid. Rooms aren't quite as impressive as the exterior or the common rooms, but are comfortable enough. It's well worth forking out the extra €15 for the front rooms with small balconies and sea views (not available for singles). Prices are the same for weekends and weekdays.

Hotel Princess Büyükkada (☎ 382 1628; www.buyukadaprincess.com; Iskele Meydanı 2; r Sun-Thu €70, Fri & Sat €85; 🍷 🍴) This recently refurbished hotel is right in the heart of things on the clock tower square. Rooms are large and pleasant enough. Seaview rooms are worth the €10 extra.

Monastery of St George Restaurant (mezes €2-4, grills €3-6, beer €2) Simple but appetising food is served at outdoor tables here.

Alibaba Restaurant (☎ 382 3733; Gülistan Caddesi 20; mezes €3-5, fish €6-12) is a popular, friendly spot and one of the many licensed waterside restaurants next to the ferry terminal.

Getting There & Away

At least nine daily ferries run to the islands between 6.50am and 9pm, departing from Sirkeci's 'Adalar İskelesi' dock (Map pp96-7), about 150m east of the dock for car ferries to Harem. The most useful departure times for day-trippers are 8.30am, 10am and 11.30am – but timetables change, so check beforehand. The trip costs €1.50 to the islands, and the same for each leg between the islands and the

return trip. The cheapest and easiest way to pay is to use your Akbil (see p161). Note that the ferries seem dangerously overcrowded on summer weekends; time your trip for weekdays or make sure you board the vessel and grab a seat at least half an hour before departure unless you want to stand the whole way.

The ferry steams away from Sirkeci, out of the Golden Horn and around Seraglio Point (Saray Burnu), offering fine views of Topkapı Palace, Aya Sofya and the Blue Mosque on the right, and Üsküdar and Haydarpaşa to the left. After 20 minutes it makes a quick stop at Kadıköy on the Asian side before making its way to the first island, Kınalıada. It's not uncommon to see dolphins on this leg of the trip (25 minutes). After this, it's another 10 minutes to Burgazada, another 15 minutes again to Heybeliada and another 10 minutes to Büyükkada.

Many day-trippers stay on the ferry until Heybeliada, stop there for an hour or so and then hop on another ferry to Büyükkada, where they have lunch and spend the rest of the afternoon.

You can also take a fast catamaran from Eminönü or Kabataş to Bostancı on the Asian shore, then another from Bostancı to Heybeliada and Büyükkada, but you save little time and the cost is much higher.