

Istanbul



In his memoir *Istanbul: Memories of a City*, Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk describes Istanbul as 'an archipelago of neighbourhoods' within which live people whose lives – like the history of this extraordinary city – are reflected in the city views that flow before their eyes, 'like memories plucked from dreams'. These populous neighbourhoods, some dating from the Byzantine era, some from the golden age of the Ottoman sultans and some from recent, less affluent times, make the city what it is – a dilapidated but ultimately cohesive mosaic of buildings, suburbs and people with distinctly different but equally fascinating histories and personalities.

Here, you can retrace the steps of the Byzantine emperors when visiting Sultanahmet's extraordinary monuments and museums; marvel at the magnificent mosques built by the Ottoman sultans on the city's seven hills; and wander the cobbled streets of ancient Jewish, Greek and Armenian neighbourhoods in the Western Districts. Centuries of urban sprawl unfurl before your eyes on ferry trips up the Bosphorus or Golden Horn. You can even cross between religiously conservative suburbs in Asia to hedonistic entertainment hot spots along the European shore in a matter of minutes.

The city's overwhelming feeling of decrepitude and *hüzün* (melancholy) that Pamuk deconstructs so masterfully in his memoir is being relegated to the past, replaced with a sense of energy, innovation and optimism not seen since the days of Süleyman the Magnificent. Monument building is back in fashion, with a slew of stunning contemporary art galleries opening around the city, and the strong possibility of a European-flavoured future is being wholeheartedly embraced in the glamorous rooftop bars of Beyoğlu and the powerful boardrooms of Levent. There has never been a better time to visit.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Uncover the secrets of opulent **Topkapi Palace** (p103)
- Marvel at one of the world's great skylines from a fashionable **rooftop bar** (p151)
- Kick up your heels at one of Istanbul's down-to-earth **meyhanes** (tavern; p139)
- Admire the extraordinary Byzantine mosaics and frescoes at the **Chora Church** (p113)
- Take a ferry trip along the mighty **Bosphorus** or up the fascinating **Golden Horn** (p121)
- Join the crush and lose yourself in the labyrinthine **Grand Bazaar** (p109)
- Contemplate the cutting edge at one of the city's new **contemporary art galleries** (p117)



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 locate 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 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, Septimius 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 his self-titled 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 Theodosian Walls (p114) 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, uncle of Justinian (r 527–65), who succeeded him as emperor. 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 (p98), built in 537. Justinian's ambitious building projects and constant wars of reconquest exhausted his treasury and his empire. Following his reign, the Byzantine Empire would never again be as large, powerful or rich.

Much of ancient Constantinople's building stock remains, 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, who became known as Fatih (the Conqueror), came to power in 1451 and immediately departed his capital in Edirne, aiming to conquer the once-great Byzantine city.

In four short months, Mehmet oversaw the building of Rumeli Hisarı (p122), the great fortress on the European side of the Bosphorus; and also repaired 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 provided by the city's mighty walls on the western side. No matter how heavily Mehmet's cannons battered them, the Byzantines rebuilt the walls 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 great emperors such as Constantine and Justinian, Mehmet the Conqueror at once began to rebuild and repopulate the city. He chose the conspicuous promontory of Seraglio Point as the location for his ostentatious palace, Topkapı, and he also 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 and his architect Mimar Sinan (p111) being 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; these include the city's largest and grandest mosque, the Süleymaniye (1550). Later sultans also added mosques and in the 19th century numerous palaces were built along the Bosphorus, among them Dolmabahçe (p117).

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 had been 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 affirm this, the first great international luxury express train, the famous *Orient Express*, connected Istanbul and the French capital in 1883.

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. The city's streets and neighbourhoods decayed, its infrastructure was neither maintained nor improved and virtually no economic development occurred.

The city stayed this way until the 1990s, when a renaissance occurred. Since this time, public transport has been upgraded, work on a cross-Bosphorus tunnel is well under way, suburbs have been reinvigorated and parks 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, and the city is currently awash with restoration and remodelling projects.

Istanbul's cultural transformation is just as marked. The seedy dives of Beyoğlu have been replaced by funky cafés, bars and studios, transforming the suburb into a bohemian hub. Galleries such as Istanbul Modern, SantralIstanbul, the Pera Museum and the Sakıp Sabancı Müzesi have opened, showcasing Turkey's contemporary art to the world. The live-music scene in the city has exploded, making Istanbul a buzzword for creative, energetic music with a unique East-West twist. And a new generation of artisans is refining and repositioning the city's traditional crafts industries – making for shopping experiences that are as exciting as they can be unexpected.

In short, Turkey's bid to join the EU is underpinned by the fact that these days its beloved Istanbul is a cosmopolitan and sophisticated megalopolis that 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/Anatolia. 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

İSTANBUL IN...

Two Days

Start the day by marvelling at the **Blue Mosque** (p100) and its venerable neighbour, **Aya Sofya** (p98). Next, investigate the watery depths of the **Basilica Cistern** (p101). By this stage you'll be in need of a rest, so make your way up Divan Yolu towards the **Grand Bazaar** (p109) and have lunch at **Sefa Restaurant** (p135), **Havuzlu** (p136) or **Fez Cafe** (p137). 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** (p111) by the water at Eminönü. After taste-testing your way through this historic market, finish the day by sampling the national dish and admiring the panoramic views at **Hamdi Et Lokantası** (p136) or **Zinhan Kebap House at Storks** (p137). After dinner return to the Blue Mosque, grab a seat at **Café Meşale** (p149) and sit back and enjoy a nargileh (traditional water pipe).

Day two should be devoted to **Topkapı Palace** (p103) and the **İstanbul Archaeological Museums** (p108). Start at the palace and plan on spending at least four hours exploring. Enjoy a simple lunch or cup of tea at **Caferağa Medresesi** (p136) before making your way down the hill to the museums to marvel at their collections. For dinner, you should make your way across the Galata Bridge to cosmopolitan Beyoğlu, promenade down **İstiklal Caddesi** (p115), have a drink at a **rooftop bar** (p151) and end the night by enjoying meze and rakı with the locals at a **meyhane** (p139) on Nevzade or Sofyalı Sokaks.

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary, then on your third day hop onto a **ferry** (p121) at Eminönü and explore the Bosphorus or Golden Horn. In the late afternoon, pamper yourself at a **hamam** (p126) – try Cağaloğlu or Çemberlitaş for maximum Ottoman ambience. Kick on to a restaurant in **Beyoğlu** (p138) for dinner and then make your way to one of the Bosphorus superclubs on the **Golden Mile** (p152). Day four should see you heading towards the Western Districts of Old İstanbul to contemplate the extraordinarily beautiful Byzantine mosaics and frescoes at the **Chora Church** (p113) before lunch at elegant **Asitane** (p137) or at the atmospheric **Şehzade Mehmed Sofrası** (p136). In the afternoon, make your way back to Sultanahmet and check out the impressive **Museum of Turkish & Islamic Arts** (p101), before strolling along the **Arasta Bazaar** (p100) to the **Great Palace Mosaic Museum** (p100). Wind down over a delicious dinner with the city's power brokers at **Balıkçı Sabahattin** (p135) or overlooking Aya Sofya and the Blue Mosque at **Teras Restaurant** (p135).

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** (p115) and/or the **Pera Museum** (p116). Eat lunch in Beyoğlu and then spend the afternoon shopping (p154) or at **Dolmabahçe Palace** (p117). Stay over this side for dinner, maybe kicking onto a jazz club (p153) afterwards. On day six the water beckons again and a ferry to the **Princes' Islands** (p164) is in order. Your last day in the city could start at one of the city's most revered buildings, the magnificent **Süleymaniye Camii** (p110) and move over to **Kadıköy** (p121) in Asia, with a delectable lunch at **Çiya** (p121), a walk around the produce market and a drink in one of the hip bars on Kadife Sokak.

Cankurtaran (*jan-kur-tar-an*), 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 some of the best restaurants, shops, bars and nightclubs

in the city. It's also home to Taksim Sq, the heart of 'modern' İstanbul.

The city's glamour suburbs include Nişantaşı, and Teşvikiye, north of Taksim Sq, and 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 currently Haydarpaşa station near Kadıköy on the Asian side and Sirkeci station at Eminönü. See p160 and p160 for details about getting to and from these transport hubs.

Maps

A free sheet map of İstanbul is available from tourist-information offices, and while it's only of average quality, it's as good as any sheet map on sale locally. For more-detailed guidance, including all minor streets, look for MepMedya's two-volume *İlçe İlçe A'dan Z'ye İstanbul (İstanbul city plan and map; TL75)*. You can find it at **Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-511 4432; Babali Caddesi 40, Çarşaloğlu; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) or in **İstanbul Kitapçısı** (see right).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Bibliophiles will want to head towards the **Old Book Bazaar** (Map pp90-1; Sahafkar Çarşısı, Beyazıt), in a shady little courtyard west of the Grand Bazaar. It dates from Byzantine times. In Beyoğlu, you could spend years foraging through the stacks of secondhand books (some in English) on the two floors at **Aslihan Pasajı** (Map pp94-5; Balık Pazar, Galatasaray).

İstanbul's best range of bookshops is along or just off İstiklal Caddesi in Beyoğlu, but there are one or two in other locations. Those useful for travellers include:

Galeri Kayseri (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-512 0456; Divan Yolu 11 & 58, Sultanahmet; ☎ 9am-9pm) Has some English-language fiction and glossy books set in or about İstanbul; the other shop over the road – same owner – holds near-identical stock.

Homer Kitabevi (Map pp94-5; ☎ 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.

İstanbul Kitapçısı (Map pp94-5; ☎ 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, plus a great selection of maps, prints, postcards and music.

Linda's Book Exchange (Map pp94-5; ground fl, 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.

Pandora (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-243 3503; Büyükparmakkapı Sokak 8b; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Wed, 10am-9pm Thu-Sat, 1-8pm Sun) This long-standing independent bookshop has recently opened a new store dedicated solely to English-language books. It has great crime fiction and travel sections, as well as loads of books about Turkey.

Robinson Crusoe (Map pp94-5; ☎ 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, plus travel guides and a good range of art magazines.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 112)

Fire (☎ 110)

Police (☎ 155)

Tourist police (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-527 4503; Yerebatan Caddesi 6, Sultanahmet) Across the street from the Basilica Cistern.

Internet Access

Most hotels and hostels provide a computer terminal with free internet access for their guests; many also provide free wi-fi. If this isn't the case, there are internet cafés all over the city, including:

Café Turka Internet Café (Map pp92-3; 2nd fl, Divan Yolu Caddesi 22, Sultanahmet; per hr TL2.50; ☎ 9am-midnight) Always full of backpackers and Sultanahmet locals, who come to check their email and drink tea while lolling on the beanbag chairs.

Robin Hood Internet Café (Map pp94-5; 4th fl, Yeni Çarşı Caddesi 8, Galatasaray; per hr TL2; ☎ 9am-11.30pm) Opposite the Galatasaray Lycée, this is a friendly place up a steep flight of stairs. There's wi-fi access on the balcony.

There's wi-fi access at Atatürk International and Sabiha Gökçen International Airports, at Java Studio (p136), in Sultanahmet, at

Kahvedan (p138) in Cihangir and at branches of Kahve Dünyası, Starbucks, Ozsüt and Gloria Jean's. See the website www.ttnet.net.tr for other locations throughout the city.

Laundry

It can cost up to TL20 to have a small load of clothes washed and dried in a laundry – hostels will usually charge half this. Self-service launderettes are almost unknown, so you can either seek out a local laundry and drop your load off to be done, or ask your hotel or hostel to organise this for you.

Media

The monthly English edition of *Time Out İstanbul* (TL4) has a large listings section and is the best source for details about upcoming events – you can pick it up at the airport or at newspaper booths in Sultanahmet.

Published three times per year, the glossy *Cornucopia* magazine (TL20) features many İstanbul-specific articles, including excellent restaurant and exhibition reviews. It's impossible to find in Sultanahmet, but you can buy it in most of the bookshops along İstiklal Caddesi in Beyoğlu or at airport newsagencies.

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. Both accept credit-card payments and charge around TL160 for a standard consultation.

Alman Hastanesi (German Hospital; Map pp94-5;

☎ 0212-293 2150; Siraselviler Caddesi 119, Taksim;

☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat) A few hundred metres south of Taksim Sq on the left-hand side, this hospital has eye and dental clinics and English-speaking staff.

Amerikan Hastanesi (American Hospital; Map pp86-7;

☎ 0212-444 3777; Güzelbahçe Sokak 20, Nişantaşı;

☎ 24hr emergency department) About 2km northeast of Taksim Sq, this hospital has English-speaking staff and a dental clinic.

Money

ATMs are everywhere in İstanbul and include those conveniently located next to Aya Sofya Meydanı in Sultanahmet (Map pp92-3) 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

İstanbul's central PTT (post office; Map pp92-3) 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 (p667) should be sent here.

There's a convenient PTT booth (Map pp92-3) on Aya Sofya Meydanı in Sultanahmet and there are PTT branches in the basement of the law courts (Map pp92-3) on İmran Öktem Caddesi in Sultanahmet; on İstiklal Caddesi near Galatasaray Sq (Map pp94-5); near the Galata Bridge in Karaköy (Map pp94-5); and in the southwestern corner of the Grand Bazaar (Map p109).

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**, which has offices in **Sultanahmet** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-512 5452; Yerebatan Caddesi 15; ☎ 10am-6.15pm Mon-Sat) and **Taksim** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-444 0040; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 20; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm 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.

Bayazit Sq (Hürriyet Meydanı; Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-522 4902; ☎ 9am-5pm) Note that there was talk of closing this booth when we researched this book.

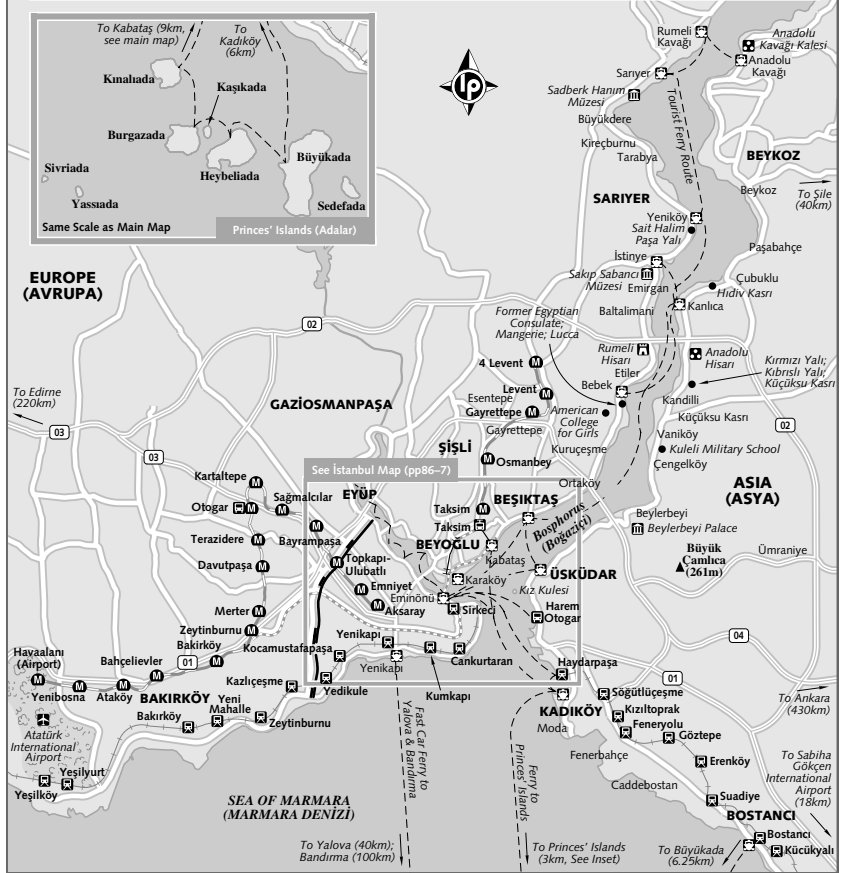
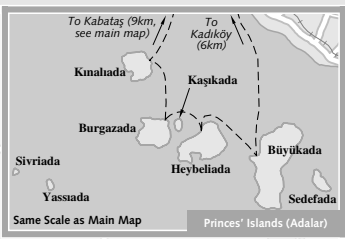
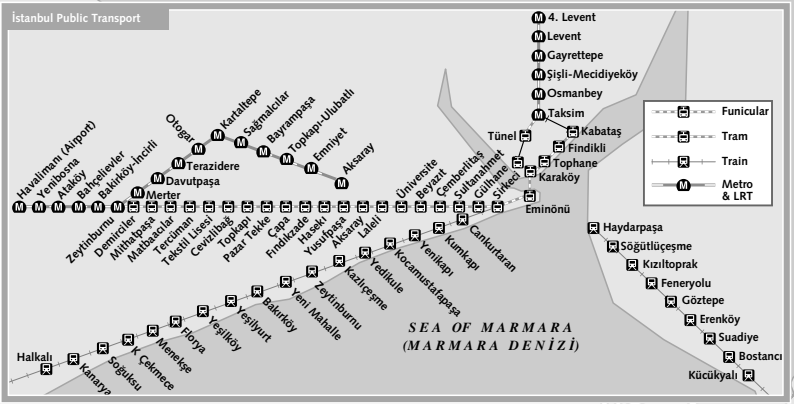
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GREATER İSTANBUL & TRANSPORT MAP

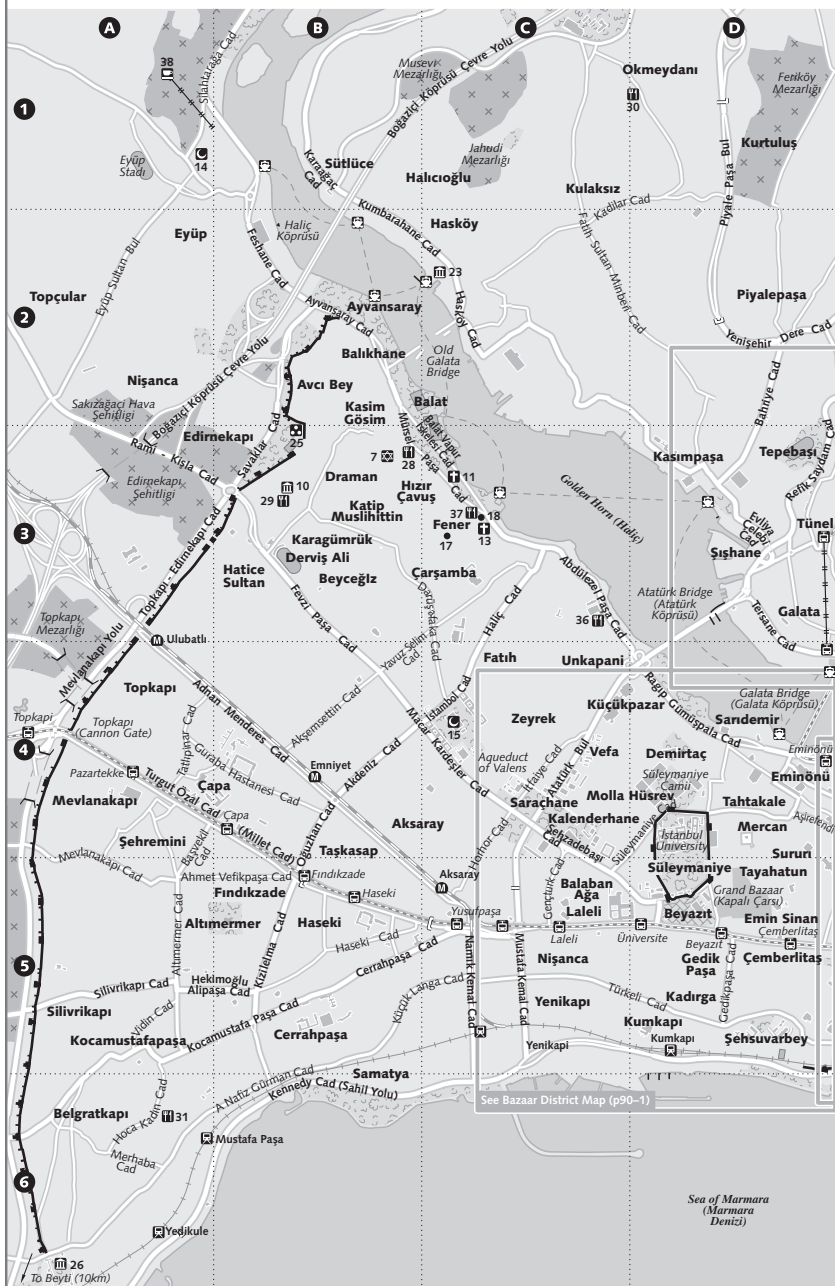
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Istanbul Public Transport

- Funicular
- Tram
- Train
- Metro & LRT



İSTANBUL

Sea of Marmara
(Marmara Denizi)



İSTANBUL (pp86-7)

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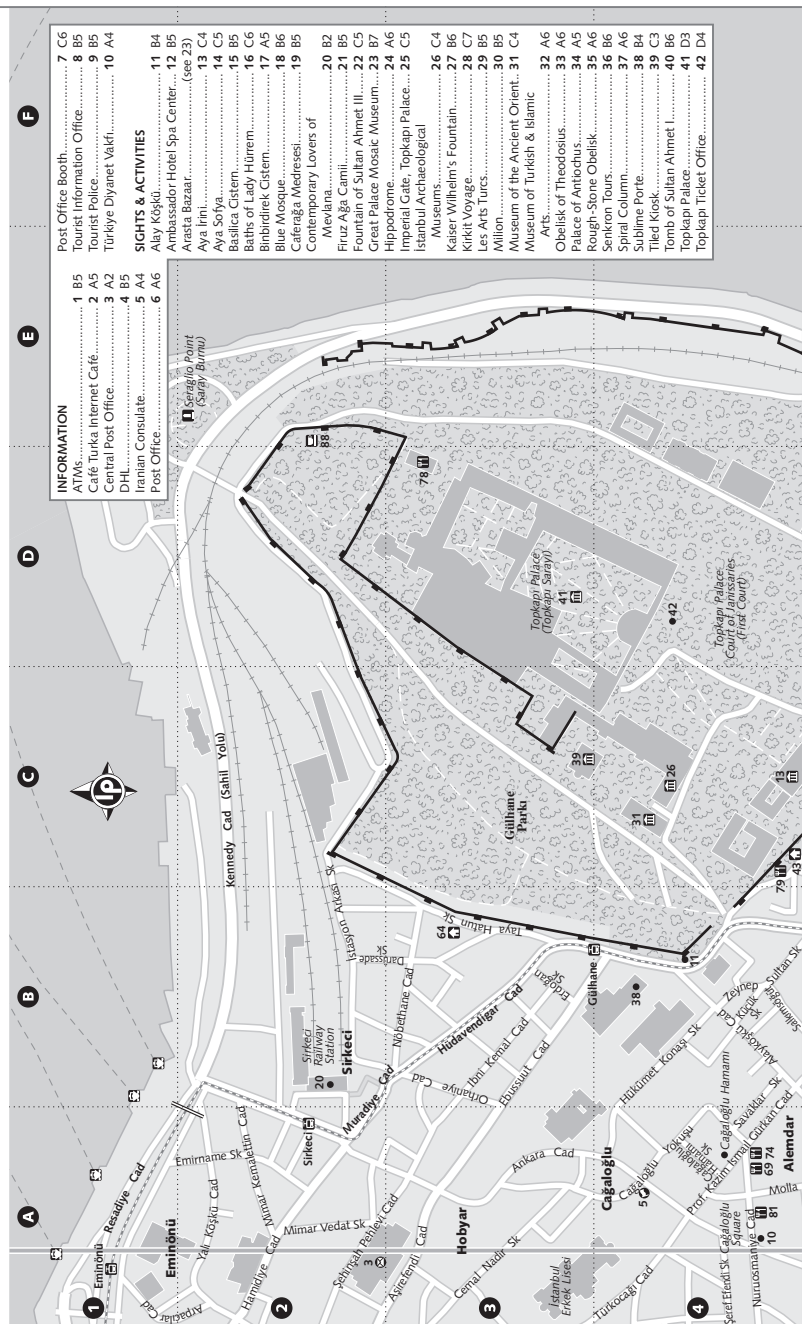
BAZAAR DISTRICT

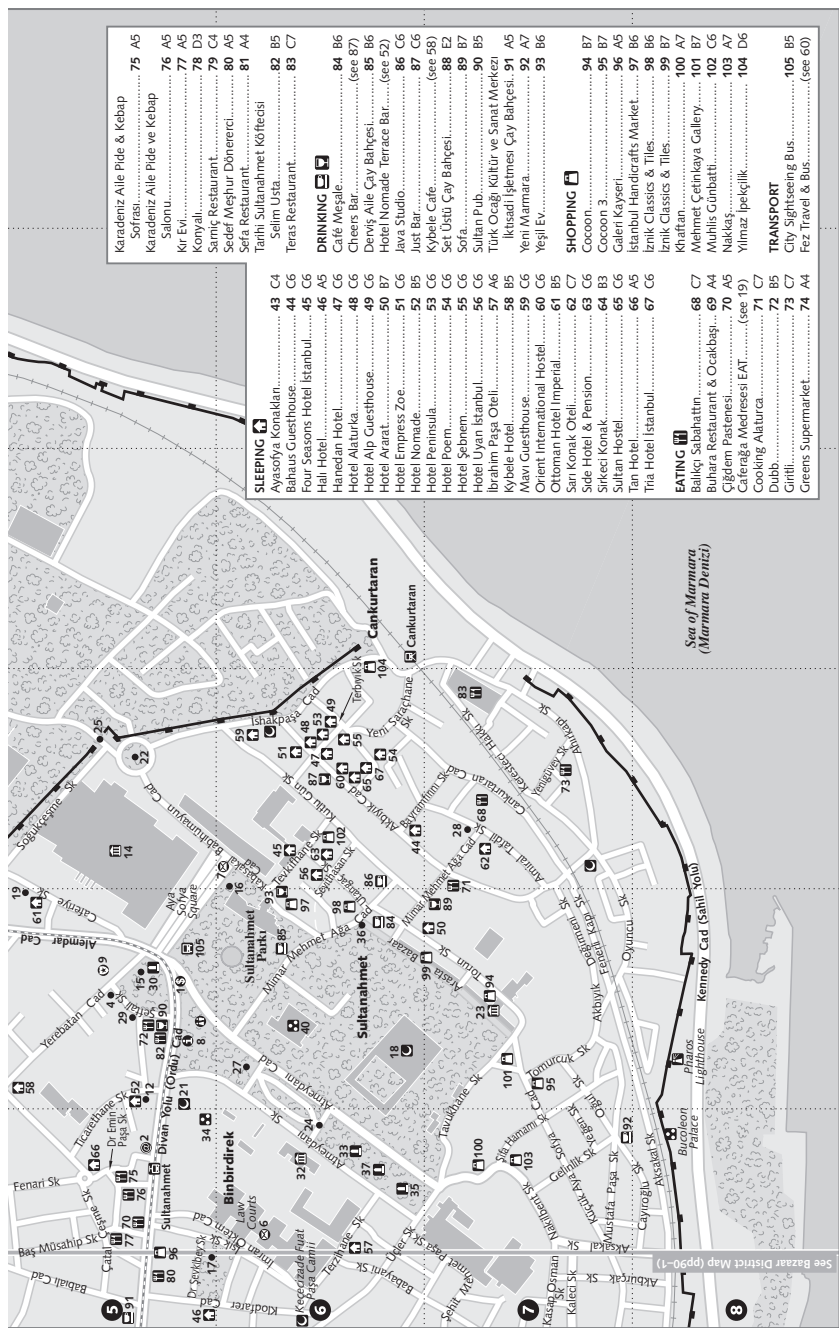


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Elmadag (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-233 0592; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) In the arcade in front of the İstanbul Hilton Hotel, just off Cumhuriyet Caddesi about a 10-minute walk north of Taksim Sq.

Sultanahmet (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-518 8754; 🕒 9am-5pm) At the northeast end of the Hippodrome.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

İstanbul is no more nor less safe a city than any large metropolis, but there are a few dangers worth highlighting. Some İstanbullular drive like rally drivers, and there is no such thing as a generally acknowledged right of way for pedestrians. As a pedestrian, give way to cars, motorcycles and trucks in all situations, even if you have to jump out of the way. Bag-snatching is also a slight problem, especially on Galipdede Sokak in Tünel and on İstiklal Caddesi's side streets. Lastly – and probably most importantly – you should be aware of the long-standing scam concerning men, bars and women. What could possibly go wrong you ask? See p660 for the low-down.

SIGHTS

Sultanahmet & Around

It's not surprising that many visitors to İstanbul never make it out of Sultanahmet – after all, few cities have such a concentration of sights, shops, hotels and eateries within easy walking distance. This is 'Old İstanbul', a Unesco-designated World Heritage site packed with so many wonderful things to see that 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 pp92-3; ☎ 0212-522 0989; Aya Sofya Meydani, Sultanahmet; adult/under 6yr TL20/free, official guide (45 min) TL50; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-Apr, to 7.30pm May-Oct; upper gallery closes 15-30 min earlier) is İstanbul'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. Supported by 40 massive ribs, it was constructed of special hollow bricks made in Rhodes from a unique light, porous clay; these rest on huge pillars concealed in the interior walls, which creates an impression that the dome hovers unsupported. (Compare the Blue Mosque's four huge interior 'elephant's feet' pillars and you will appreciate the genius of Aya Sofya's design.)

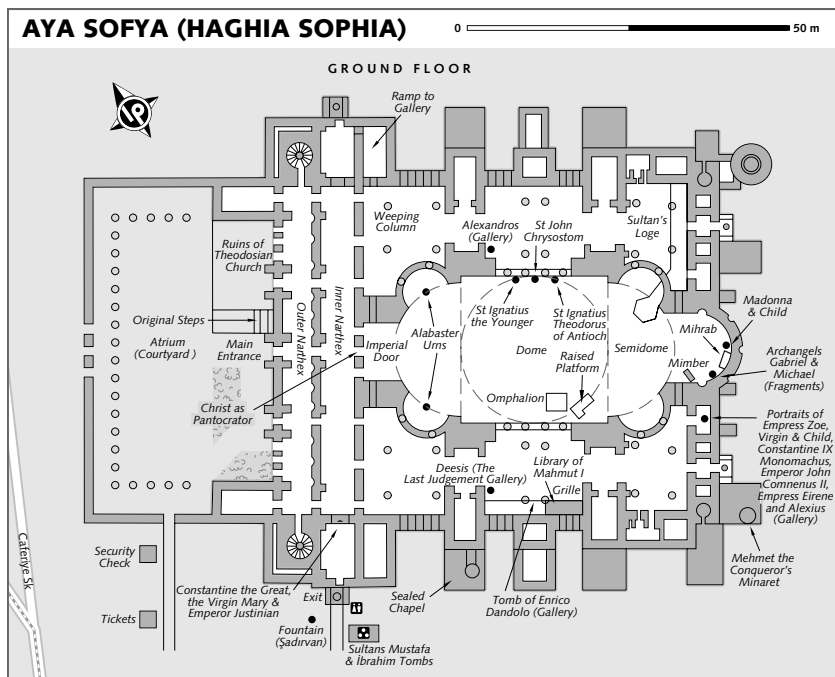
The curious elevated kiosk screened from public view is the **Sultan's loge**. Ahmet III (r 1703-30) had it built so he could come in, pray and leave again unseen, thus preserving the imperial mystique. The ornate **library**, on the west wall, was built by Sultan Mahmut I in 1739.

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 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 Emperor 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 Judgment)* in the south gallery dates from the early 14th century. Christ is at the 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 (r 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 pp92-3; Aya Sofya Meydanı 4, Sultanahmet), 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 in recent years has been functioning as a carpet shop. It is currently closed to the public pending discussions between the Ministry of Culture and private operators about it reopening as a functioning hamam.

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 pp92-3; 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 as its venerable neighbour: four huge 'elephant's feet' pillars hold up the dome, a less elegant but sturdier solution to the problem of support.

The tile-encrusted **Tomb of Sultan Ahmet I** (Map pp92-3; 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 13, died

one year after the mosque was constructed, aged only 27. He rests here with a dozen or so children, powerful evidence that wealth and privilege didn't make the imperial family immune from tragedy.

GREAT PALACE MOSAIC 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 Mosaic Museum** (Büyüksaray Mozaik Müzesi; Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-518 1205; Torun Sokak, Sultanahmet; admission TL8; ☒ 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 pp92-3) now houses numerous carpet and ceramic shops that provide rental revenue for the upkeep of the Blue Mosque.

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

HIPPODROME

The Byzantine emperors loved nothing more than an afternoon at the chariot races, and the **Hippodrome** (Atmeydanı; Map pp92-3) was their venue of choice. In its heyday, the rectangular arena consisted of two levels of galleries, a central spine, starting boxes and the semicircular end known as the sphendone.

The Hippodrome was the centre of Byzantine life for 1200 years and of Ottoman life for another 400-odd years. The Byzantines supported the rival chariot teams of 'Greens' and 'Blues', which 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.

Despite the fact that the Hippodrome could end up being 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 for their disappearance 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 İstanbul, was carved in Egypt during the reign of Thutmose III (r 1549–1503 BC) and erected in the Amon-Re temple at Karnak. 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 for the carvings of Theodosius, his wife, sons, state officials and bodyguards watching the chariot action from the *kathisma* (imperial box).

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.

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 that it was clad with sheets of gilded bronze by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus

(r 913–59), something 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 pp92-3; ☎ 0212-518 1805; At Meydanı 46, Sultanahmet; admission TL10; 🕒 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 bed-chamber 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, you'll be wowed by one of the world's best collection of antique carpets and some equally impressive manuscripts and miniatures. Labels are in both Turkish and English.

The coffee shop 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 Sarnığı; Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-522 1259; www.yerebatan.com; Yerebatan Caddesi 13, Sultanahmet; admission TL10; 🕒 9am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, to 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.

GREAT PALACE OF BYZANTIUM

Constantine the Great built the Great Palace soon after he founded Constantinople in AD 324. Successive Byzantine leaders left their mark by adding to it, and the complex eventually consisted of hundreds of buildings enclosed by walls and set in terraced parklands stretching from the Hippodrome over to Hagia Sofia (Aya Sofya) and down the slope, ending at the sea walls and the Bucoleon Palace. The palace was finally abandoned after the Fourth Crusade sacked the city in 1204, and its ruins were pillaged and filled in after the Conquest, becoming mere foundations for much of Sultanahmet and Cankurtaran.

Various pieces of the Great Palace have been uncovered – many by budding hotelier ‘archaeologists’ – and an evocative stroll exploring the Byzantine substructure is a great way to spend an afternoon. The mosaics in the **Great Palace Mosaic Museum** (p100) once graced the floor of the complex; excavations at the Sultanahmet Archaeological Park in Babühümeyun Caddesi, southeast of Aya Sofya, have been ongoing since 1998 and were poised to open to the public as this book went to print. Controversially, some of these excavations are being subsumed into a new extension of the neighbouring luxury Four Seasons Hotel. You can also visit the Bucoleon Palace (Kennedy Caddesi) by the sea walls.

For more information, check out www.byzantium1200.com, which has 3-D images that bring ancient Byzantium to life, or purchase a copy of the lavishly illustrated guidebook *Walking Through Byzantium: Great Palace Region*, which was also produced as part of the Byzantium 1200 project. You’ll find it in shops around Sultanahmet. Also of interest is the project’s exhibition in the Byzantine **Binbirdirek Cistern** (Binbirdirek Sarnıcı, Philoxenos Cistern; Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-518 1001; www.binbirdirek.com; İmran Öktem Sokak 4, Binbirdirek; admission TL10; 🕒 9am-7pm summer, 9am-6pm winter).

Like most sites in İstanbul, the cistern has a colourful history. Known in Byzantium as the Basilica Cistern because it lay 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).

KÜÇÜK AYA SOFYA CAMİİ

Justinian and Theodora built this **church** (Little Aya Sofya, SS Sergius & Bacchus Church; Map p109; Küçük Aya Sofya Caddesi; donation requested) some time 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.

After being listed on the World Monuments Fund (www.wmf.org) register of endangered buildings, this gorgeous example of Byzantine architecture has recently been restored and is looking terrific. There's a tranquil *çay bahçesi* (tea garden) in the forecourt.

After visiting Küçük Aya Sofya, go north up Şehit Mehmet Paşa Sokak and back up the hill to see the diminutive but truly beautiful **Sokollu Mehmet Paşa Camii** (Map pp90–1), designed by Sinan in 1571.

TOPKAPI PALACE

Opulent **Topkapı Palace** (Topkapı Sarayı; Map pp92–3; ☎ 0212-512 0480; www.topkapisarayi.gov.tr/eng; Babühümayun Caddesi; admission palace TL20, Harem TL15; 🕒 9am–7pm Wed–Mon summer, 9am–5pm winter) is the subject of more colourful stories than most of the world's royal residences put together. It was home to Selim the Sot, who drowned after drinking too much champagne; İbrahim the Mad, who lost his reason after being imprisoned for 22 years by his brother Murat IV; and the malevolent Roxelana (p35), a former concubine who became the powerful consort of Süleyman the Magnificent. And they're just three among a long progression of mad, sad and downright bad Ottomans who lived here between 1453 and 1839.

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 İftariye Baldachin. Buy your ticket to the palace 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 TL20 per person (minimum three people or TL60). Alternatively, an audio-guide costs TL5. 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 pp92–3), built in 1728 by the sultan who loved and promoted tulips so much that his reign was dubbed the 'Tulip Era'.

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 **Aya İrini** (Hagia Eirene, Church of the Divine Peace; Map pp92–3), commissioned in the 540s by Justinian to replace an earlier church that had occupied this site. The building here is almost exactly as old as Aya Sofya. Unfortunately, it's only usually opened for concerts during the International Istanbul Music Festival (p129). Also on the left is the gate to the Imperial Mint (Darphane-i Amire), where temporary exhibitions are sometimes held.

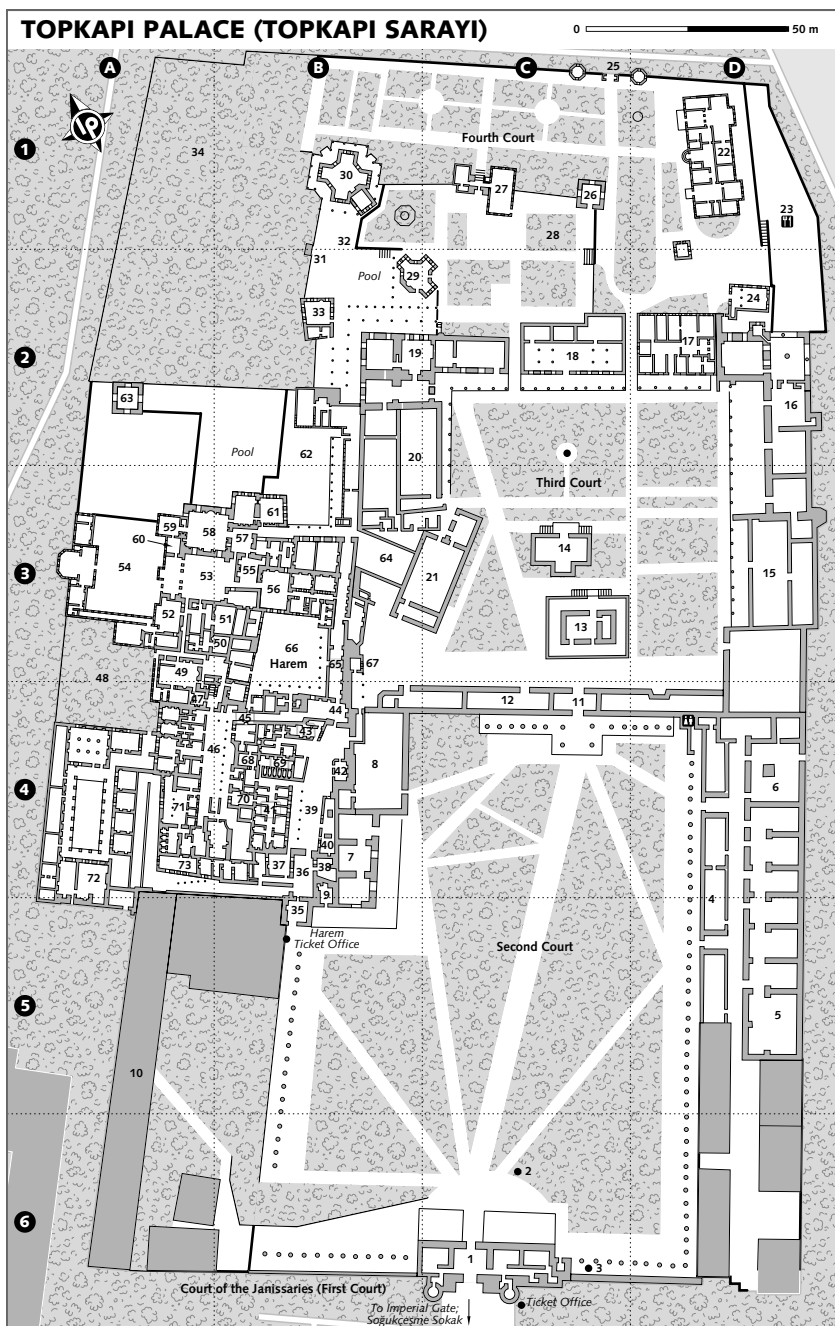
Second Court

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 instead 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



SECOND COURT		FOURTH COURT		Sultan Ahmet's Kiosk.....	47 A4
Middle Gate.....	1 C6	Mecidiye Köşkü.....	22 D1	Harem Garden.....	48 A3
Audio Tour Booth.....	2 C6	Konyalı Restaurant.....	23 D1	Valide Sultan's Quarters.....	49 A3
Imperial Carriages.....	3 C6	Sofa or Terrace Mosque.....	24 D2	Sultan's Hamam.....	50 B3
Palace Kitchens.....	4 D5	Gate of the Privy Gardens.....	25 C1	Valide Sultan's Hamam.....	51 B3
Chinese & Japanese Porcelain.....	5 D5	Chief Physician's Room.....	26 C1	Chamber of Abdül Hamit I.....	52 A3
Helvahane (Temporary Exhibitions).....	6 D4	Kiosk of Mustafa Pasha.....	27 C1	Imperial Hall.....	53 A3
Imperial Council Chamber.....	7 B4	Tulip Garden.....	28 C1	Terrace of Osman III.....	54 A3
Inner Treasury.....	8 B4	Revan Kiosk.....	29 B2	Room with Hearth.....	55 B3
Kiosk.....	9 B4	Baghdad Kiosk.....	30 B1	Room with Fountain.....	(see 55)
Imperial Stables.....	10 A5	İftariye Baldachin.....	31 B2	Consultation Place of the Genies.....	56 B3
Gate of Felicity.....	11 C4	Marble Terrace & Pool.....	32 B1	Beautifully Tiled Antechamber.....	57 B3
THIRD COURT		Circumcision Room.....	33 B2	Privy Chamber of Murat III.....	58 A3
White Eunuchs' Quarters.....	12 C4	Lower Gardens of the Imperial Terrace.....	34 A1	Library of Ahmet I.....	59 A3
Audience Chamber.....	13 C3	HAREM		Dining Room of Ahmet III.....	60 A3
Library of Ahmet III.....	14 C3	Carriage Gate.....	35 B5	Double Kiosk.....	61 B3
Dormitory of the Expeditionary Force (Costumes).....	15 D3	Dome with Cupboards.....	(see 35)	Favourites' Courtyard & Apartments.....	62 B2
Imperial Treasury.....	16 D2	Hall with Şadırvan.....	36 B4	Private Prison.....	63 A2
Museum Directorate.....	17 D2	Black Eunuchs' Mosque.....	37 B4	Harem Mosque.....	64 B3
Treasury Dormitory.....	18 C2	Tower of Justice.....	38 B4	Golden Road.....	65 B3
Sacred Safekeeping Rooms.....	19 B2	Courtyard of the Black Eunuchs.....	39 B4	Courtyard of the Valide Sultan.....	66 B3
Quarters of Pages in Charge of the Sacred Safekeeping Rooms (Paintings Calligraphy).....	20 B2	Harem Eunuchs' Mosque.....	40 B4	Birdcage Gate.....	67 B3
Mosque of the Eunuchs & Library.....	21 C3	Black Eunuchs' Dormitories.....	41 B4	Harem Kitchen.....	68 B4
		Harem Chamberlain's Room.....	42 B4	Imperial Princes' School.....	69 B4
		Chief Black Eunuch's Room.....	43 B4	Women's Hamam.....	70 B4
		Main Gate.....	44 B4	Women's Dormitory.....	71 A4
		Second Guard Room.....	(see 44)	Harem Hospital.....	72 A4
		Concubines' Corridor.....	45 B4	Laundry Room.....	73 A4
		Concubines' & Consorts' Courtyard.....	46 A4		

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, has a display of some of the huge pots and pans that were used in the palace's heyday.

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.

Harem

If you decide to tour the Harem – and we highly recommend that you do so – you'll need to purchase a dedicated ticket; these are available from the ticket office outside the Harem's entrance.

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. Girls 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, compartment, 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 showed sufficient aptitude and were beautiful enough – to the sultan himself.

Ruling the Harem was the *valide 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.

Highlights of the tour include the narrow **Courtyard of the Black Eunuchs** (map key 39), **Sultan Ahmet's Kiosk** (47), the **Courtyard of the Concubines & the Sultan's Consorts** (46), the **Quarters of the Valide Sultan** (49), the ornate **Privy Chamber of Murat III** (58) and the **Double Kiosk/Apartments of the Crown Prince** (61).

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 ambassadors' 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 below 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 the 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. 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.

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.

After passing through the third room and having a gawk at the enormous gold and diamond **candlesticks** 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 pedlar for three spoons.

Fourth Court

Pleasure pavilions occupy the northeastern part of the palace, sometimes called the Tulip Garden or Fourth Court. A late addition to Topkapı, the **Mecidiye Köşkü** was built by Abdül Mecit (r 1839–61). Beneath it is Topkapı's only eatery, Konyalı restaurant; 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 three 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.

Cutting 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 Ramazan 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.

SOĞUKÇEŞME SOKAK

Soğukçeşme Sokak, or Street of the Cold Fountain, runs between the Topkapı Palace walls and Aya Sofya. In the 1980s the Turkish Touring & Automobile Association (TTAA) acquired all of the buildings on the street and decided to demolish most of them to build nine re-creations of the prim Ottoman-style houses that had occupied the site in the previous two centuries. A vitriolic battle played out on the pages of İstanbul's newspapers ensued, with some experts arguing that the

city would be left with a Disney-style architectural theme park rather than a legitimate exercise in conservation architecture. The TTAA eventually got the go-ahead (after the intervention of no less than Turkey's president) and in time opened all of the re-created buildings as Ayasofya Konakları (p132), one of the first boutique heritage hotels in the city. Conservation theory aside, the colourful buildings and cobbled street are particularly picturesque and worth wandering past.

CAFERAĞA MEDRESESİ

This lovely little **medrese** (☎ 0212-513 360; Caferiye Sokak; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-7pm), which is tucked away in the shadows of Aya Sofya, was designed by Sinan on the orders of Cafer Ağa, Süleyman the Magnificent's chief black eunuch. Built in 1560 as a school for Islamic and secular education, today it is home to the Turkish Cultural Service Foundation (p128), which runs workshops in traditional Ottoman arts such as calligraphy, *ebru* (traditional Turkish marbling) and miniature painting. Some of the arts and crafts produced here are for sale and there's a pleasant *lokanta* (eatery serving ready-made food) in the courtyard (see p136).

GÜLHANE PARKI

Once the park of the Topkapı Palace, shady Gülhane Parkı (Map pp92–3) is now a popular relaxation spot for locals rather than the sultans. It's particularly pretty in late March and early April, when the thousands of tulip bulbs planted to celebrate the International İstanbul Tulip Festival (see p129) come into bloom. Make sure you head to the north end of the park and enjoy a pot of tea at the **Set Üstü Çay Bahçesi** (see p149), which has 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 MUSEUMS

It may not pull the number of visitors that flock to nearby Topkapı, but this superb **museum complex** (Arkeoloji Müzeleri; Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-520 7740; Osman Hamdi Bey Yokuşu, Gülhane; admission TL10; 🕒 9am-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 for your visit.

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 and artist Osman Hamdi Bey (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 Vallaury 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 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 Bey unearthed these sarcophagi in Sidon (Side in modern-day Lebanon) in 1887 and in 1891 persuaded the sultan to build this museum to house them.

In the first room 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. Note its beautifully rendered horses, centaurs and human figures. Next to this is the **Satrap Sarcophagus**, with its everyday scenes featuring a provincial governor.

After admiring these, pass into the next room to see the famous marble **Alexander Sarcophagus**, one of the most accomplished of all classical artworks. It's known as the Alexander Sarcophagus because it depicts the Macedonian general and 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 a Nemean Lion's head, the symbol of Hercules, as a headdress. 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.

The rooms beyond house an impressive collection of ancient grave cult sarcophagi from Syria, Lebanon, Thessalonica, Ephesus and other parts of Anatolia.

After seeing these, turn back and walk past Bes to room 4, the first of six **galleries of statues**. Look for the Ephebos of Tralles in room 8 and the exquisite head of a child from Pergamum in room 9.

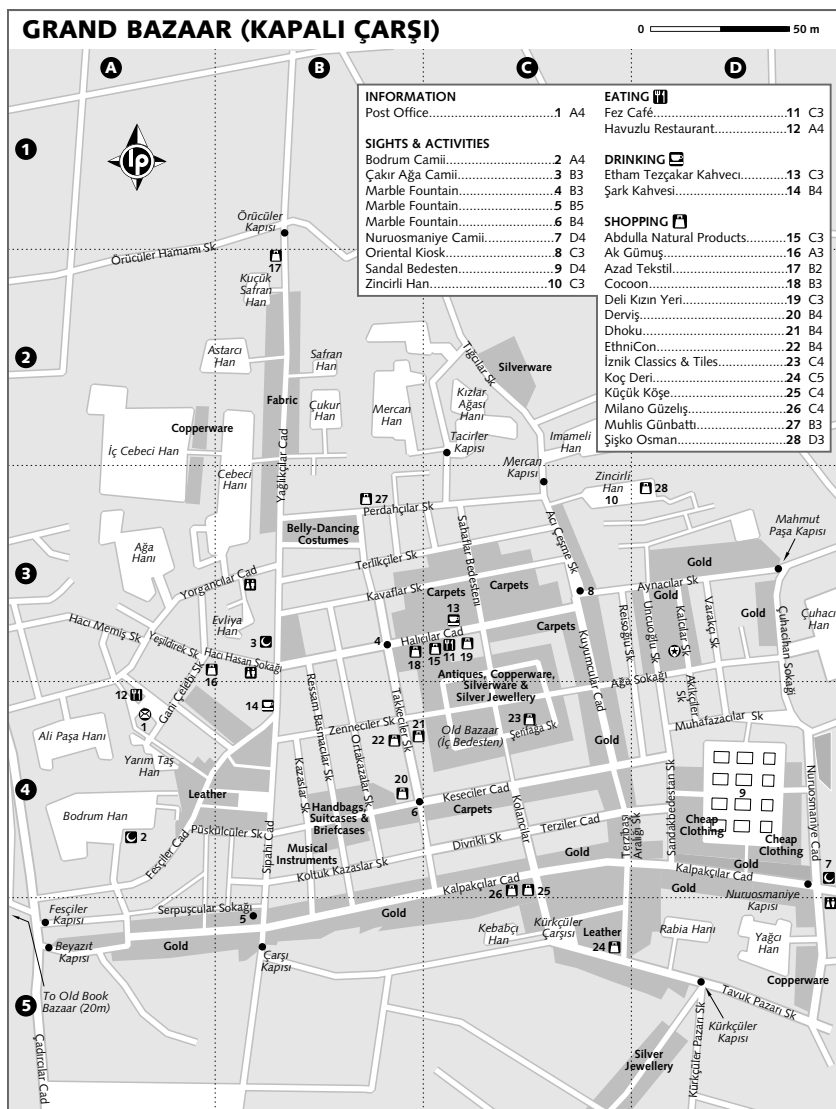
The annexe behind the main ground-floor gallery is home to a **Children's Museum**. While children will be bored stiff with the naff dioramas of early Anatolian life, they will no doubt be impressed by the large-scale model of the Trojan Horse, which they can climb into. Beside the Children's Museum is a fascinating exhibition entitled '**In the Light of Day**', which focuses on the archaeological finds that have resulted from the city's huge Marmaray transport project (p163).

If you have even a passing interest in İstanbul's rich archaeology, don't miss the mezzanine level above showcasing '**İstanbul 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 İstanbul, it was built in 1472 as an outer pavilion of Topkapı Palace and was used for watching sporting events. It now houses an impressive collection of Seljuk, Anatolian and Ottoman tiles and ceramics.

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 Beyazıt Camiisi.

GRAND BAZAAR

The labyrinthine and chaotic **Grand Bazaar** (Kapalı Çarşı, Covered Market; Map pp90-1; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) is the heart of the old city and has

been for centuries. No visit to İstanbul 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) and take every side street to dig out tiny boutiques and workshops. Drink too much çay, 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 **Beyazıt Camii** (Mosque of Sultan Beyazıt II; Map pp90–1). Beyazıt 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 Hürriyet Meydanı (Freedom Sq), although everyone knows it simply as Beyazıt. 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 Istanbul University.

SÜLEYMANİYE CAMİİ

The **Süleymaniye Camii** (Mosque of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent; Map pp90–1; Prof Siddık 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, rich-

est and most powerful of the Ottoman sultans, Süleyman the Magnificent (r 1520–66), and was the fourth imperial mosque built in Istanbul.

Although it's not the largest of the Ottoman mosques, the Süleymaniye is certainly the grandest. It was designed by Mimar Sinan (see boxed text, opposite), 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 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 Istanbul.

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.

The *küllüye* (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, hamam etc. Today the soup kitchen, with its charming garden courtyard, houses the Darüzzıyafe Restaurant. Although it's a lovely place to enjoy a cup of tea, the food here has been barely edible on our visits. **Lale Bahçesi** (p149), located in a sunken courtyard next to Darüzzıyafe, is a popular hang-out for uni students, who come here for a chat, çay and nargileh (traditional water pipe).

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

ŞEHZADE MEHMET CAMİİ

Süleyman the Magnificent commissioned Sinan to design the **Şehzade Mehmet Camii** (Mosque of the Prince; Şehzadebaşı Caddesi, Kalenderhane; donation requested) in memory of his son Mehmet, who died of smallpox at the age of 22. It was

THE GREAT SİNAN

Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent's reign is known as the golden age of the Ottoman Empire, but it wasn't only his codification of Ottoman law and military prowess that earned him respect. Süleyman's penchant for embellishing Istanbul with architectural wonders had a lot to do with it. And Süleyman couldn't have done this without Mimar Sinan, Turkey's best-known and greatest architect. Together they perfected the design of the classic Ottoman mosque.

Born in 1497, Sinan was a recruit to the *devşirme*, the annual intake of Christian youths into the janissaries (Ottoman army), becoming a Muslim (as all such recruits did) and eventually taking up a post as a military engineer in the corps. Süleyman the Magnificent appointed him the chief of the imperial architects in 1538. He designed a total of 321 buildings, 85 of which are still standing in Istanbul.

Most Sinan-designed mosques have 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 facade, and surrounded by smaller domes and semidomes.

Istanbul'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 it this one. The **Atik Valide Camii** (p120) in Üsküdar is similar to the Süleymaniye in many ways, most notably in the extent of its *külliye* (mosque outbuildings, often including hamam, theological school, hospital, cemetery and soup kitchen). The much smaller, tile-encrusted **Rüstem Paşa Camii** (below) and **Sokollu Mehmet Paşa Camii** (Map pp92–3) are both exquisite, well rewarding anyone who makes the effort to see them.

Sinan didn't only design and construct mosques. The **Çemberlitaş Hamamı** (p126) is also one of his works, giving you a perfect excuse to blend your architectural studies with a pampering session. He also designed the **Baths of Lady Hürrem** (p99) and the **Caferaga Medresesi** (p107).

Sinan's works survive in other towns of the Ottoman heartland, particularly Edirne (p168), the one-time capital of the Empire.

completed in 1548 and is noteworthy for its delicate minarets and attractive garden setting. You can also enjoy a meal or glass of tea at **Şehzade Mehmed Sofrası** (p136), in the charming *külliye* building behind the mosque.

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 pp90–1; 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 both sets of entry steps, there's a terrace and the mosque's colonnaded porch. You'll immediately notice the panels of İznik tiles set into the mosque's facade. 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 in-

fluence 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* ('Louse of Fortune') because even though he was found to be infected with lice before his marriage to Mihrimah, Süleyman's favourite daughter, this did not prevent his marriage or his subsequent rise to great fame and fortune. 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 for the stairs on Hasırçılar Caddesi, or to the left of the ablutions block on the side street.

SPICE BAZAAR

Need a herbal love potion or some natural Turkish Viagra? Istanbul's **Spice Bazaar** (Mısır Çarşısı, Egyptian Market; Map pp90–1; ☎: 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 Camii 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) – try the highly regarded **Malatya Pazari** (shop 44) if you want to take home some dried fruit or nuts. 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, potions, lotions and the sultan's very own aphrodisiac. Most of the shops offer vacuum packaging, which makes getting souvenirs home easy.

The bazaar is also home to one of the city's most atmospheric restaurants, Pandeli. Its mosaic-clad interior is gorgeous, but the food has been dreadful on our recent visits – try going before or after lunch for a tea instead. If you're keen to eat somewhere in the bazaar, **Bab-ı Hayat** (p136) is your best bet.

On the western side of the market there are outdoor produce stalls selling fresh food-stuffs from all over Anatolia. Also here is Hasırcılar Caddesi, a narrow street selling spices and other goods that are often a fraction of the price of equivalent products in the Spice Bazaar. Look out for the flagship store of the most famous coffee purveyor in Turkey, **Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi** (Map pp90–1), which is on the corner nearest to the bazaar.

YENİ CAMII

Only in İstanbul would a 400-year-old mosque be called 'New'. The **Yeni Camii** (New Mosque; Map pp90–1; Yenıcamı Meydanı Sokak, Eminönü; donation requested) was begun in 1597, commissioned by Valide Sultan Safiye, mother of Sultan Mehmet III (r 1595–1603). Safiye lost her august position (and disposable income) 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 Camii 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** (Map pp90–1). 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 pp92–3). At sunset, when the **Galata Tower** (p115) 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, the surrounds are spectacularly beautiful. During the day, the bridge carries a constant flow of İstanbullular crossing between Beyoğlu and Eminönü, a handful or two of hopeful anglers trailing their lines into the waters below, and a constantly changing procession of street vendors hawking everything from fresh-baked *simit* (sesame-coated bread rings) 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 that's not much at all), but the cafés are wonderful spots to enjoy a tea or late-afternoon beer.

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, teahouses 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 trip to Eyüp.

Western Districts

Broadly described as the district between the city walls and Sultanahmet, this old part of

Istanbul was once dotted with the churches of Byzantium. While most of the churches have been converted to mosques, and many of the houses are tumbledown or have been razed for ugly apartment blocks, a few hours' exploration in this area will give you a taste of workaday Istanbul. There are several sights worth visiting if you have the time, and the Chora Church is an absolute must-see for all visitors to Istanbul.

AQUEDUCT OF VALENS

Rising majestically over the traffic on busy Atatürk Bulvarı, this limestone **aqueduct** (Map pp90-1) is one of the city's most distinctive landmarks. Commissioned by Emperor Valens in AD 373, it was part of an elaborate system linking over 400km of water channels, some 30 bridges and over 100 cisterns within the city walls, making it one of the greatest hydraulic engineering achievements of ancient times.

ZEYREK CAMII

Originally part of an important Byzantine sanctuary comprising two churches, a chapel and a monastery, **Zeyrek Camii** (Church of the Pantocrator; Map pp90-1; İbadethane Sokak) is now in a deplorable state of disrepair, which has led to it being listed on the World Monument Fund's register of endangered buildings. 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 Comnenus II) was saved by being converted into a mosque and still has some features intact, including a magnificent 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 upmarket **Zeyrekhane** restaurant (p137), which has a terrace with glorious Golden Horn and Old City views.

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

FATIH CAMII

This **mosque** (Mosque of the Conqueror; Map pp86-7; Fevzi Paşa Caddesi, Fatih), 750m northwest of the historic Aqueduct of Valens, was the first great

imperial mosque to be built in Istanbul. 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; after being rebuilt it burned down in 1782. What you see today dates from the reign of Abdül Hamit I (r 1774-89).

The much-visited **tomb of the Conqueror** (☞ 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) is in the cemetery behind the mosque, though Mehmet is actually buried under the *mimber* (pulpit) in the mosque itself.

On Wednesday both the courtyard and the surrounding streets host a huge market selling fresh produce and clothing. This is the best time to visit; at other times you may find the 18th-century mosque relatively unimpressive.

CHORA CHURCH

Istanbul has more than its fair share of Byzantine monuments, but few are as drop-dead gorgeous as the **Chora Church** (Kariye Müzesi; Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-631 9241; Kariye Camii Sokak, Edirnekapı; admission TL15; ☞ 9am-5pm Thu-Tue). The fact that it's tucked away in the little-visited Western Districts of the city means that many visitors overlook it, but we counsel you not to do the same.

The church was originally known as 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. This one was built in the late 11th century, and underwent 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 (*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 Chora is one of the city's best museums and deserves an extended visit. On leaving, we highly recommend sampling the unusual Ottoman menu at the Asitane restaurant (p137), which is in the basement of the next-door Kariye Oteli. Alternatively, a simple *peynirli tost* (toasted cheese sandwich) and glass of tea 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 willfully 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 31E, 32, 36KE or 37E from Eminönü or bus 87 from Taksim Sq to Edirnekapı. A taxi from Sultanahmet should cost around TL10, from Taksim TL15.

YEDİKULE & THE CITY WALLS

Yedikule Hisarı (Fortress of the Seven Towers; Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-585 8933; Kule Meydanı 4, Yedikule; admission TL5; ☀ 9am-6.30pm), 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 got rid of the goats and grass and replaced them with gravel, somewhat destroying the atmosphere, but the views from the battlements are still amazing. Note that those who suffer from vertigo or who are travelling with small children should steer clear, because the stone steps are very steep and have no safety barriers.

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 pp86-7; Hoçaçakır Caddesi; admission TL3; ☀ vary) 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 do 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 or 81 from Eminönü, bus 80B from Beyazıt or bus 80T from Taksim. The bus stop is across from the small park in front of the castle.

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. In the mid-19th century it was known as Pera and acknowledged as the 'European' quarter of town. Diplomats and international traders lived and worked here, and the streets were show-cases for the latest European fashions and fads. European-style patisseries, restaurants, boutiques and embassies were all built following the European architectural styles of the day. It even had telephones, electric lights and the one of the first electric tramways in the world, the Tünel.

However, all this changed in the decades after the republic. 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 and Beyoğlu is once again the heart of modern İstanbul, ground zero for galleries, cafés and boutiques. Here, hip new restaurants and bars open almost nightly, and the streets showcase cosmopolitan Turkey at its best. Put simply, if you miss Beyoğlu, you haven't seen İstanbul.

The best way to get a feel for this side of town is to spend an afternoon or day exploring by foot. If you're based in Sultanahmet, catch the tram to Kabataş and the connecting funicular up to Taksim Sq. Then work your way down İstiklal Caddesi, exploring its many side streets along the way. At the foot of the boulevard is Tünel Sq; follow Galıpdede Caddesi downhill and you will be able to explore the historic neighbourhood of Galata before walking across the Galata Bridge to Eminönü, from where you can catch a tram or walk back up to Sultanahmet. All up it's a walk of at least two hours – but dedicating a full day will be more rewarding.

GALATA TOWER

The **Galata Tower** (Galata Kulesi; Map pp94-5; Galata Meydanı, Karaköy; admission TL10; ☎ 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. Though the view from its vertiginous panorama balcony is spectacular, we suggest enjoying this over a drink on the terrace of the Anemon Galata hotel (p134) opposite, rather than paying the inflated entry fee here.

GALATA MEVLEVİHANESİ

This **complex** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-245 4141; Galıpdede Caddesi 15, Tünel; admission TL5) is home to one of the few remaining *tekkes* (dervish lodges) in İstanbul. When this book went to print, the *tekke* was undergoing a major renovation; when it reopens it may host a weekly *sema* (whirling ceremony). Check the board outside for details.

Inside the main gates there is a garden courtyard and a graveyard with graceful Ottoman tombs. 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.

ISTANBUL MODERN

Opened in 2004, **İstanbul Modern** (İstanbul Modern Sanat Müzesi; Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-334 7300; www.istanbulmodern.org; Mecidi-i Mebusan Caddesi, Tophane; admission adult/student/under 12yr TL7/3/free, admission free Thu; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun, 10am-8pm Thu) is the big daddy of a slew of newish, privately funded art galleries in the city. Its stunning location on the shores of the Bosphorus and its extensive collection of Turkish 20th-century art make it well worth a visit. Icing on the cake is provided by a constantly changing and uniformly excellent program of exhibitions by local and international artists in the temporary galleries on the ground floor.

There's also a well-stocked gift shop, a cinema that shows art-house films and a stylish café-restaurant with superb views of the Bosphorus.

İSTİKLAL CADESİ

In the late 19th century **İstiklal Caddesi** (Independence Ave; Map pp94-5) was known as the Grande Rue de Pera, and it carried the life of the modern city up and down its lively promenade. It's still the centre of İstanbul life, 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 pp94-5), 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.

Close by is the Cité de Pera building, home to the famous **Çiçek Pasajı** (Flower Passage; Map pp94-5). When the *Orient Express* rolled into Old İstanbul 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* (Turkish taverns) 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 one of İstanbul's most colourful and popular eating precincts, **Nevezade Sokak** (see boxed text, p139).

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

PERA MUSEUM

If, like many travellers, you've seen reproductions of the famous Osman Hamdi Bey painting *The Tortoise Trainer* and fallen in love with it, the **Pera Museum** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-334 9900; www.pm.org.tr; Meşrutiyet Caddesi 141, Tepebaşı; adult/student/under 12yr TL7/3/free; 🕒 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, noon-6pm Sun) is the place to view the real thing. It's part of the museum's wonderful collec-

tion of Orientalist paintings, which occupies the third floor. Other floors host permanent exhibitions of Kütahya tiles and ceramics, Anatolian weights and measures and top-notch temporary exhibitions.

TAKSİM SQUARE

The symbolic heart of modern İstanbul, this busy **square** (Map pp94-5) 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.

The square is in no way a triumph of urban design – in fact, it's 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.

SEEING THE DERVISHES WHIRL

The brotherhood called the Mevlevi, or whirling dervishes, follows a mystical form of Islam that uses allegorical language to describe a love for God, and is famous for its meditative *sema*, a whirling ceremony that represents a union with God.

The Mevlevi are guided by the teachings of Celaleddin Rumi, known as Mevlâna (Our Guide). Born in 1207, Rumi was a brilliant student of Islamic theology who became profoundly influenced by Şemsî Tebrizi, a Sufi (Islamic mystic) disciple.

The Mevlevi order was outlawed by Atatürk in the 1920s as part of his reforms, but in the early 1950s the Turkish government recognised the tourist potential for 'whirling' and the Konya Mevlâna Festival (p488) was born. The whirling dervish 'performance' is a growing drawcard for visitors to Turkey, but the Mevlevi order is still technically outlawed in the country.

You can see the dervishes whirl in a number of spots around İstanbul, but frankly most of them are little more than tourist shows. The best place to see an authentic *sema* is in one of the few practising *tekkes* left in İstanbul, at Fatih, some 4km west of Sultanahmet. The *sema* is usually only held on Monday nights and it's best to come here with a local escort. You could ask at your hotel, or go with **Les Arts Turcs** (see p128), which takes travellers to the ceremony from its studio, after giving them a one-hour information session about Sufism and the *sema* (€25).

The second-best option is usually to go to the Galata Mevlevihanesi (see p115), where *semas* have been held for centuries (in recent years mainly for the benefit of tourists). When this book went to print the museum was closed for restoration – check the boards outside for updates. There is also a performance by the **Contemporary Lovers of Mevlana** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-449 9081; www.whirlingdervishistanbul.com; tickets adult/student TL30/20; 🕒 7.30pm Tue & Sat) in the atmospheric exhibition hall on platform 1 at Sirkeci station in Sultanahmet. Tickets here go on sale from 5pm on the day of the performance. Note that works associated with the Marmaray project (p163) may lead to the relocation of this performance.

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 p489.

CONTEMPLATE THE CUTTING EDGE

We reckon the recent trend for Istanbul's family business dynasties to endow private art galleries is the best thing to hit the city since the tulip bulb arrived. Suddenly, Istanbul has a clutch of world-class contemporary art museums to add to its already impressive portfolio of major tourist attractions. No wonder it's been named a European Capital of Culture for 2010.

The first cab off the rank was the **Proje4L/Elgiz Museum of Modern Art** (Elgiz Çağdaş Sanat Müzesi, İstanbul; ☎ 0212-281 5150; www.elgizmuseum.org; Harman Sokak, Harmancı Giz Plaza; 📍 10am-6pm Wed-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) in Levent, closely followed by **Istanbul Modern** (p115) in Tophane and the **Pera Museum** (opposite) in Beyoğlu. And let's not forget the privately endowed universities, which are joining the fray with style and loads of substance – the **Sakip Sabancı Müzesi** (p123) and **Santralİstanbul** (p125) are the two most prominent, but there are others as well. Many have become venues for the **International Istanbul Biennial** (www.istfest.org), held between September and early November in odd-numbered years.

All of this is great news for the visitor, who can see world-class exhibitions in drop-dead-gorgeous surrounds complete with stylish gift shops and quality cafés. Some are even free – and you gotta love that.

On the square's north side is a hectic bus terminus; on its east side is the **Atatürk Cultural Centre** and on the west is the Marmara Hotel. In the middle is the entrance to the metro running up to Levent 4 and the funicular tram running down to Kabataş.

ASKERİ MÜZE (MILITARY MUSEUM)

For a rousing experience, present yourself at the splendid **Military Museum** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-233 2720; Vali Konağı Caddesi, Harbiye; adult/student TL3/1; 📍 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. There's also a huge diorama of the Conquest, complete with sound effects. The upper floor has displays on WWI and the War of Independence, including a Çannakale (aka Gallipoli) diorama.

The easiest way to get to the museum is to walk up Cumhuriyet Caddesi from Taksim Sq. This will take around 20 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 takes place between 3pm and 4pm most days.

Beşiktaş & Ortaköy DOLMABAĞÇE PALACE

These days it's fashionable for critics influenced by the less-is-more aesthetic of the

Bauhaus masters to sneer at buildings such as **Dolmabahçe Palace** (Dolmabahçe Sarayı; Map p97; ☎ 0212-236 9000; www.millisaraylar.gov.tr; Dolmabahçe Caddesi, Beşiktaş; admission Selamlık only TL15, Harem-Cariyeler only TL10, Selamlık & Harem-Cariyeler TL20, Crystal Palace & Clock Museum TL4; 📍 9am-4pm Tue-Wed & Fri-Sun summer, 9am-3pm winter). Enthusiasts of Ottoman architecture also decry this flourish of the imperial dynasty, finding that it shares more in common with the Paris Opera than Topkapı Palace. But whatever the critics may say, this 19th-century imperial residence is a clear crowd favourite.

Less is more 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 one of his predecessors, 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 a European-style building with neo-baroque and neoclassical decoration. Eschewing pavilions, the building turns in on itself and ignores its splendid Bosphorus views.

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, as 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.

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

İSTANBUL DENİZ MÜZESİ

Landlubbers and sea dogs alike will enjoy a visit to this **museum** (Naval Museum; Map p97; ☎ 0212-261 0040; www.dzkk.tsk.mil.tr; cnr Cezayir & Beşiktaş Caddesi, Beşiktaş; adult/student €2/1; 🕒 9am–12.30pm & 1.30–5pm Wed–Sun), which celebrates Ottoman maritime history. Exhibits focus on two great Turkish sailors: the 16th-century sailor and cartographer Piri Reis; and the admiral of Süleyman the Magnificent's fleet, Barbaros Heyrettin Paşa. Highlights include a coloured 1461 map of the Mediterranean drawn on antelope skin, and part of the huge iron chain that the Byzantines stretched across the Golden Horn to block Mehmet the Conqueror's ships.

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 (minibuses) waiting to run them straight to the Military Museum in Harbiye.

To get here, catch the tram from Sultanahmet to Kabataş and then bus 22E, 22, 22RE or 25E to Beşiktaş.

YILDIZ PARKI

A pretty, leafy oasis alive with birds, picnickers and couples indulging in a bit of hanky-panky in the bushes, **Yıldız Parkı** (Map p97; Çırağan

Caddesi; admission free) is a pleasant spot to while away a few hours. Once the imperial gardens of nearby Çırağan Palace, this is where Sultan Abdül Hamit II built an Ottoman-European palace, Yıldız Şale, where foreign dignitaries could stay and two ornate pavilions where he, his family and said visiting foreign dignitaries could relax. One of these, the **Çadır Köşkü**, built beside the Yıldız lake between 1865 and 1870, now functions intermittently as a café.

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 and then turn right, you will see the entrance to **Yıldız Sarayı Müzesi** (Yıldız Şale, Yıldız Chalet Museum; Map p97; ☎ 0212-259 4570; admission TL5; 🕒 9.30am–5pm Tue–Wed & Fri–Sun Apr–Oct, to 4pm Nov–May). Though he managed to avoid the building frenzy embraced by many of his predecessors, Abdül Hamit II (r 1876–1909) dallied at least once with architects and builders. He built this fancy guest house–palace here in 1882, and expanded it in both 1889 and 1898 for state visits by Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany. When the Kaiser left, the sultan decided he liked the place so much that he moved in himself, deserting the much larger and more ornate Dolmabahçe in the process. As you enter, a guide will approach and give you a half-hour tour in Turkish. Although the chalet isn't as plush as Dolmabahçe, it's a lot less crowded and has many of the same features, albeit on a more modest scale.

Around 500m past the turn-off to Yıldız Şale you'll come to the **Malta Köşkü** (Map p97; ☎ 0212-258 9453; 🕒 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 tea or 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 Taksim Sq to the top of the hill should cost around TL8.

ORTAKÖY CAMİİ

Ortaköy (Middle Village; Map p97) is a charming waterside suburb embracing a jumble of Ottoman buildings renovated as stylish boutiques, bars and eateries. On balmy nights the restaurants, bars and cafés on and around the teeny cobbled square by the water overflow with locals enjoying a drink

or meal while indulging in 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 modern Bosphorus Bridge looming behind it, the mosque provides the classic photo opportunity for those wanting to illustrate İstanbul's 'old-meets-new' character.

Try to time your visit for Sunday, when the bustling street market fills the cobbled lanes. Do as the locals do and come for brunch, then pick through the market's beaded jewellery, hats and other trinkets before heading home to avoid the late-afternoon traffic crush. See p140 for our favourite eating picks.

To get here from Sultanahmet, catch the tram to Kabataş and then bus 22, 22RE, 25E or 30D; from Taksim Sq, catch bus DT2, 40, 40T or 42T (get off at the Kabataş Lisesi bus stop). Be warned that traffic along Çırağan Caddesi is almost always congested, so bus and taxi trips here can be excruciatingly slow.

Asian Shore

Although most of İstanbul's noteworthy sights, shops, bars and eateries are on the European side of town, many locals prefer to live on the Asian (aka Anatolian) shore, citing cheaper rents and a better standard of living. For others, the best thing about living in or visiting this side of town is the scenic ferry ride between the continents.

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 Chrysopolis (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 Chrysopolis was superior to Chalcedon and, as Byzantium blossomed, Chrysopolis 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 working-class suburb with a handful of important Ottoman

mosques that attract visitors. If you're here for lunch, choices include **Kanaat Lokantası** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0216-553 3791; Selmanı Pak Caddesi 25; mains TL6-11; 🕒 11am-9pm), one of the city's most famous *lokantas*. It offers traditional dishes such as *paça çorba* (sheep's-trotter soup, TL3.30) as well as a host of less confrontational alternatives. You'll find it in the street behind the Ağa Camii. Another good option is the Üsküdar branch of **Niyazibey** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0216-310 4821; Ahmediye Meydanı; mains TL4-18; 🕒 11am-9pm), the local branch of a popular chain of kebab restaurants. This serves a delicious and dirt-cheap *perde pilavı* (chicken and almond pie, TL6). It's on the road to the Atik Valide Camii.

If coming to Üsküdar from Sultanahmet, catch the ferry from Eminönü. This 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 6.45am and run every 20 to 30 minutes until 9pm.

Kız Kulesi

İstanbul is a maritime city, so it's appropriate that the **Kız Kulesi** (Maiden's Tower; Map pp86-7; ☎ 0216-342 4747; www.kizkulesi.com.tr; 🕒 9am-11pm), 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 right (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 and believably associated with the Gallipoli Peninsula. More recently, the tower featured in the 1999 Bond film *The World is Not Enough*. Though it's possible to visit the tower (which now functions as a lacklustre restaurant and café) by boat, we don't recommend wasting the TL6 charged for the trip.

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 set out from here en route to Mecca and Medina for the Haj, further emphasising the suburb's reputation for piety.

As you leave Üsküdar dock, the main square, Demokrasi Meydanı (currently being redeveloped as part of the Marmaray project, p163), is right in front of you. Its northeastern corner is dominated by the **Mihrimah Sultan Camii** (Map pp86–7), sometimes referred to as the İskele (ferry dock) 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 pp86–7). 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 pp86–7). 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 and there's a popular *çay bahçesi* on its southern side.

The **Atik Valide Camii** (Map pp86–7; Çinili Camii Sokak) is another of Sinan's works, and is considered by many experts to be among his best designs. 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.

The nearby **Çinili Camii** (Tiled Mosque; Map pp86–7; Çinili Camii Sokak) is unprepossessing from the outside, but has an interior made 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 further on. All up it's about a 25-minute walk to the Çinili Camii from the main square.

HAREM

Florence Nightingale Museum

The experience of visiting the Selimiye Kızları (Army Barracks), where this modest **museum** (Map pp86–7; ☎ 0216-556 8161; fax 0216-310 7929; Nci Ordu Komutanlığı 1; admission free; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri) 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 other factors 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 İstanbul.

To be allowed into the barracks, you need to fax a letter requesting to visit the museum 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 the Harem car ferry from

Sirkeci, next to Eminönü (it also transports passengers). This leaves every 30 minutes from 7am to 9.30pm. After alighting from the ferry, walk south (right) along the main road for approximately 10 minutes until you reach the Selimiye Kızları Harem Kapısı (the barracks' Harem Gate).

KADIKÖY

If you've got a spare few hours, you may want to explore Kadıköy, the site of the city's first colony. Although there's nothing to show of its historic beginnings and no headline sights, Kadıköy has a youthful, modern vibe that can be a welcome respite from conservative Old İstanbul. There's a fantastic fresh produce market south of the ferry dock, in the middle of which is **Çiya Sofrası** (☎ 0216-330 3190; www.ciya.com.tr; Güneşbahçe Sokak 43; mains TL8-12 ☎ 11.30am-10pm), one of the city's best *lokantas*. After sampling its magnificent food, head to the authentically retro **Baylan Pastanesi** (☎ 0216-336 2881; Muvakkithane Caddesi 19; ☎ 10am-10pm) for an excellent coffee. Then make your way to Kadife Sokak to check out its independent cinema, grunge boutiques and hugely popular bars, the most popular of which is **Karga Bar** (☎ 0216-449 1725; Kadife Sokak 16; ☎ 11am-2am).

To the north of Kadıköy is the neoclassical **Haydarpaşa Train Station**, 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 there's talk of turning it and its surrounds into a controversial recreation and trade precinct, boasting seven high-rise towers. Most ferries travelling between Kadıköy and Eminönü or Karaköy make a quick stop here.

To get to Kadıköy 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 8.35pm. The last ferry back to Eminönü is at 8pm.

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. The last ferry back to Karaköy is at 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 9.15pm. The last ferry back to Beşiktaş is at 8.45pm.

ACTIVITIES

Ferry Cruises

During the 18th and 19th centuries the Bosphorus and Golden Horn were alive with caiques (long, thin rowboats), their oars dipping rhythmically into the currents as they carried the sultan and his courtiers from palace to pavilion, and from Europe to Asia. The *caïques* are long gone, but in their place are the sleek speedboats of the moneyed elite and the much-loved public ferries used by the rest of İstanbul's population. Few experiences are as evocative of place as a trip on an İstanbul ferry – whether it be the short return trip to Kadıköy or Üsküdar (p119), on which you cross from Europe to Asia and back again, or one of the longer trips detailed below.

BOSPHORUS CRUISE

Divan Yolu and İstiklal Caddesi are 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) to the Black Sea (Karadeniz), located 32km north of the city centre. In modern Turkish, the strait is known as the Boğaziçi or İstanbul Boğazı (from *boğaz*, meaning throat or strait). On one side is Asia, on the other is Europe.

Departure Point: Eminönü

Hop onto the boat at the Boğaz Iskelesi (Bosphorus Public Excursion Ferry Dock) on the Eminönü quay. It's always a good idea to arrive 30 to 45 minutes or so before the scheduled departure time so as to be sure of getting a seat with a view. The Asian shore is to the right side of the ferry as it sails down the Bosphorus, Europe is to the left. As you start your trip up the Bosphorus, you'll see the small island and tower of **Kız Kulesi** (p119), on the Asian side, near Üsküdar. On the European shore, you'll pass grandiose **Dolmabahçe Palace** (p117). In his travelogue *Constantinople in 1890*, French writer Pierre Loti described this and the neighbouring **Çırağan Palace** as 'a line of palaces white as snow, placed at the edge of the sea on marble docks', a description that remains as accurate as it is evocative.

Beşiktaş to Kanlıca

After a brief stop at Beşiktaş the ferry sails past Çırağan Palace (now the Çırağan Palace Hotel Kempinski) and Ortaköy Meydanı (Ortaköy Sq), known for its pretty mosque

(p118) and outdoor eateries. Towering over the mosque's minarets is the huge Bosphorus Bridge (Boğaziçi Köprüsü), opened in 1973 on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Turkish republic. Just after the bridge, on the Asian side, is **Beylerbeyi Palace** (Beylerbeyi Sarayı; ☎ 0216-321 9320; Abdullah Ağa Caddesi, Beylerbeyi; admission TL8; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun Nov-Mar). Every sultan needed a little place to escape to, and this 30-room palace was the place for Abdül Aziz (r 1861-76). 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. The ferry doesn't stop here, but you can visit another time by catching bus 15 from Üsküdar and getting off at the Çayırbaşı stop.

Past the suburb of Çengelköy on the Asian side is the imposing **Kuleli Military School**, built in 1860 and immortalised in İrfan Orga's wonderful memoir *Portrait of a Turkish Family*. Look for its two 'witch-hat' 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 *yahıs*. The word *yahı* derives from the Greek word for 'coast', and is used to describe the wooden summer residences that were built along the Bosphorus shore 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 hill above Arnavutköy are buildings formerly occupied by the **American College for Girls**. Its most famous alumna was Halide Edib Adivar, who wrote about the school in her 1926 autobiography *Memoir of Halide Edib*.

Arnavutköy runs straight into the glamorous suburb of **Bebek**, famous for chic cafés such as **Mangerie** (☎ 0212-263 5199; 3rd fl, Cevdet Paşa Caddesi 69; ☎ 8am-midnight) and **Lucca** (☎ 0212-257 1255; Cevdet Paşa Caddesi 51b; ☎ noon-2am Mon, 10am-2am Tue-Sun). As the ferry passes, look out for the mansard roof of the **former Egyptian consulate**, an art nouveau minipalace built by the last khedive of Egypt, Abbas Hilmi II. It's just south of the waterside park.

Opposite Bebek is **Kandilli**, the 'Place of Lamps', named after the lamps that were lit here to warn ships of the particularly treacherous currents at the headland. Among the many *yahıs* here is the small **Kırmızı Yalı** (Red Yalı), constructed in 1790; a little further on is the long, white **Kıbrıslı Mustafa Emin Paşa Yalı**.

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 grassy, shady delta, which the Ottoman elite thought just perfect for picnics. Foreign residents, who referred 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 rococo **Küçükso Kasrı** (☎ 0216-332 3303; Küçükso Caddesi; admission adult/student TL4/1; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun Nov-Mar), constructed in 1856-57. You'll see its ornate cast-iron fence, boat dock and wedding-cake exterior from the ferry. To visit, get off the ferry at Kanlıca and catch bus 11H or 15F.

On the European side, just before the **Fatih Bridge** (Fatih Köprüsü), the majestic structure of **Rumeli Hisarı** (Fortress of Europe; ☎ 0212-263 5305; Yahya Kemal Caddesi 42; admission TL3; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Thu-Tue) looms over a pretty village of the same name. Mehmet the Conqueror had Rumeli Hisarı built in a mere four months during 1452 in preparation for his planned siege of Constantinople. For its location he chose the narrowest point of the Bosphorus, opposite Anadolu Hisarı (Fortress of Asia), which had been built by Sultan Beyazıt I in 1391. By doing so, he was able to control all traffic on the strait, thereby cutting the city off from resupply by sea. Just next to the fortress is a clutch of cafés and restaurants, the most popular of which is **Sade Kahve** (☎ 212-358 2324; Yahya Kemal Caddesi 36; breakfast plates TL14; ☎ 8am-10pm), a favourite weekend brunch spot for İstanbullular. To get to Rumeli Hisarı, get off the ferry at Yeniköy or Sarıyer (see opposite) and catch bus 25E back towards town. This bus stops at Emirgan (see opposite) as well as here at Rumeli Hisarı before terminating at Kabataş.

Almost directly under the Fatih Bridge on the Asian side is the **Köprülü Amcazade Hüseyin Paşa Yalı**. Built right on the water in 1698, it's the oldest *yahı* on the Bosphorus.

Kanlıca to Yeniköy

Past the bridge, still on the Asian side, is the charming suburb of **Kanlıca**, famous for its rich and delicious yoghurt, which can be sampled at the two cafés in front of the ferry stop or on the boat itself. This is the ferry's third stop, and if you so choose, you can stop and explore

before reboarding the boat on its return trip. From here you can also catch a ferry across to Emirgan or Bebek on the European side and return to town by bus.

High on a promontory above Kanlıca is **Hıdiv Kasrı** (Khedive's Villa; ☎ 0216-258 9453; Hıdiv Yolu 32, Kanlıca; 🕒 8am-11pm), an exquisite art nouveau villa built by the last khedive of Egypt as a summer residence. Restored after decades of neglect, it now functions as a **restaurant** (mains TL8-16) and **garden café** (tosts TL3.50-4, sandwiches TL5-6.50). The villa is a gem, and the extensive garden is superb, particularly during the International Istanbul Tulip Festival (see p129) in April. To get here from the ferry stop, turn left into Halide Edip Adivar Caddesi and then turn right into narrow Kafadar Sokak. Walk all the way up steep Hacı Muhittin Sokağı until you see a sign for Hıdiv Kasrı Caddesi – the villa is on the left.

Opposite Kanlıca on the European shore is the wealthy suburb of **Emirgan**. It's well worth visiting for the impressive **Sakıp Sabancı Müzesi** (☎ 0212-277 2200; <http://muze.sabanciuniv.edu>; Sakıp Sabancı Caddesi 42; adult/student/under 14yr TL10/3/free; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue, Thu & Fri-Sun, 10am-10pm Wed, 10am-7pm Sat), which hosts world-class travelling exhibitions. The museum is also home to one of the city's most glamorous eateries, **Müzedechanga** (☎ 0212-323 0901; mains TL21-49; 🕒 10.30am-1am Tue-Sun).

Yeniköy to Sarıyer

North of Emirgan is **Yeniköy**, on a point jutting out from the European shore. This is the ferry's next stop. First settled in classical times, Yeniköy later became a favourite summer resort, as indicated by **Sait Halim Paşa Yalı**, the lavish 19th-century Ottoman *yalı* of the one-time grand vizier. Look for its two small stone lions on the quay. On the opposite shore is the suburb of **Paşabahçe**, famous for its glassware factory.

Originally called Therapeia for its healthy climate, the little cove of **Tarabya** to the north of Yeniköy on the European shore has been a favourite summer watering place for Istanbul's well-to-do for centuries, although modern development has sullied some of its charm. For an account of Therapeia in its heyday, read Harold Nicholson's 1921 novel *Sweet Waters*.

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 these palatial residences, complete with lush gardens. Such residences extended north to the village of **Büyükdere**, which is also notable for its churches and for the **Sadberk Hanım Müzesi** (☎ 0212-242 3813; www.sadberkhanimmuzesi.org.tr; Piyasa Caddesi 25-9, Büyükdere; admission TL7; 🕒 10am-5pm Thu-Tue), named after the wife of the late Vehbi Koç, founder of Turkey's foremost commercial empire. There's an eclectic collection here, including beautiful İznik and Kütahya ceramics, Ottoman silk textiles, and Roman coins and jewellery. The museum is a 10-minute walk from the next ferry stop, at Sarıyer.

Sarıyer to Anadolu Kavağı

After stopping at Sarıyer, the ferry sails on to **Rumeli Kavağı**, known for its fish restaurants. After a short stop here it then crosses the strait to finish the journey at **Anadolu Kavağı**. Surrounded by countryside, this is a pleasant spot in which to wander and have a seafood lunch, though it's somewhat blighted by the presence of pushy restaurant touts. Perched above the village are the ruins of **Anadolu Kavağı Kalesi** (Yoros 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. To get there, it's a 25-minute walk up steep Caferbaba Sokağı.

If you decide to travel back to town by bus rather than ferry, catch bus 15A to Beykoz or Kanlıca from the main square and then transfer to bus 15 to Üsküdar or E-2 to Taksim.

Getting There & Away

There are numerous ways to explore the Bosphorus. Most people take the public Bosphorus Excursion Ferry (one way/return TL10/17.50), which leaves Eminönü at 10.35am year-round. There are usually extra services at noon and 1.35pm from mid-April to October. These ferries depart from the Boğaz İskelesi at Eminönü and stop at Beşiktaş, Kanlıca, Yeniköy, Sarıyer, Rumeli Kavağı and Anadolu Kavağı. The journey takes 90 minutes each way; return services leave Anadolu Kavağı at 3pm (year-round) and at 4.15pm and 5pm (6pm on Saturday) from mid-April to October. Options for returning to town by bus or exploring by bus along the way are mentioned in the text above. When this book went to print, a 'Moonlight

Service' was being trialled from mid-June to the end of August, leaving at 7pm and returning from Anadolu Kavağı at 10pm (weekdays only, TL20). Check www.ido.com.tr for an update.

Another, less attractive, option is to buy a ticket on a private excursion boat. These only take you as far as Rumeli Hisarı (without stopping), although the fact that the boats are smaller means that you 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 selling tickets for these trips are always around the Eminönü docks; they sell the tickets for TL20 to TL25, but it's always worth bargaining. These boats leave every 1½ to two hours from 11am, with the last one at 8pm from June to September (4pm at other times). Note that these departure times aren't fixed – boats don't usually leave until they fill up.

Bus tickets cost TL1.40 per leg.

GOLDEN HORN CRUISE

Most visitors to İstanbul know about the Bosphorus cruise, but not too many have heard about the Haliç (Golden Horn) trip. Until recently, this stretch of water to the north of the Galata Bridge was heavily polluted and its suburbs offered little to tempt the traveller. All that's changing these days, though. The waters have been cleaned up, beautification works are under way along the shores, and impressive museums and galleries are opening in the Haliç suburbs. Spending a day hopping on and off the ferry and exploring will give you an insight into a very different – and far less touristy – İstanbul.

Departure Point: Eminönü

These ferries start in Üsküdar on the Asian side, and stop at Karaköy before taking on most of their passengers at the Haliç İskeleyi (Golden Horn Ferry Dock) on the far side of the Galata Bridge at Eminönü. The *iskelesi* is behind a car park next to the Storks jewellery store. The ferry then sails underneath the Atatürk Bridge and stops at Kasımpaşa on the opposite side of the Golden Horn. This area is where the Ottoman imperial naval yards were located, and some of the original building stock is still evident.

Fener

The next stop is on the opposite shore, at Fener. This area is the traditional home of the city's Greek population, and although few Greeks are resident these days, a number of important Greek Orthodox sites are located here. The prominent red-brick building on the hill is the **Greek Lycée of the Fener** (Megali School or Great School; Map pp86–7), the oldest house of learning in İstanbul. The school has been housed in Fener since before the Conquest – the present building dates from 1881.

Closer to the shore, to the left of the ferry stop and across Abdüleziz Paşa Caddesi, is the **Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarchate** (Map pp86–7; ☎ 0212-531 9670; www.ec-patr.org; Sadrazam Ali Paşa Caddesi, Fener; donation requested; ☎ 9am–5pm). The compound is built around the historic Church of St George, which dates from 1730. Every Sunday morning, busloads of Greek Orthodox pilgrims come here for the Divine Liturgy.

To the right of the ferry stop, in the waterside park, is the attractive Gothic Revival **Church of St Stephen of the Bulgars** (Sveti Stefan Church; Mürsel Paşa Caddesi 85, Fener). This cast-iron church was constructed in Vienna, then shipped down the Danube and assembled here in 1871. It's not normally open to visitors, but sometimes functions as a venue for the International İstanbul Music Festival (p129).

If you're hungry, Fener is home to the most famous *iskembecisi* (tripe soup shop) in the city: **Tarihi Haliç İskembecisi** (Map pp86–7; ☎ 0212-534 9414; Abdüleziz Paşa Caddesi 315, Fener; ☎ 24hr). Locals swear by the hangover-fighting properties of *işkembe* and often make late-night pilgrimages here. It's on the main road opposite the ferry stop.

Those wanting a less confrontational meal should make their way to **Ottoman** (Map pp86–7; ☎ 0212-631 7567; www.halicottoman.com; Kadir Has Caddesi 9; mains TL12–20; ☎ noon–1am; ☎), which has a roof terrace and top-floor dining room overlooking the Golden Horn. The menu features regional specialities from Turkey's east as well as Ottoman dishes – everything is remarkably well priced and quite delicious. It's a 15-minute walk back towards Eminönü from the Fener *iskelesi*.

Balat

Staying on the western side of the Golden Horn, the ferry's next stop is usually Balat, once home to a large proportion of İstanbul's Jewish population and now crowded with mi-

grants from the east of the country. (Please note: when this book went to print the *Balat iskelesi* was being restored and the ferry wasn't stopping here). The oldest synagogue in İstanbul, **Ahrıda Sinagogu** (Vodina Caddesi 9, Balat), is located in Balat. Built by Macedonian Jews more than half a century ago, it was renovated in the early 1990s and can be visited on weekday mornings. To visit you'll need to email or fax the **Chief Rabbinate** (fax 0212-244 1980; info@musevicemaati.com) a few days ahead of time.

If you're in Balat at lunchtime, consider making a brief stop at the tiny, unsigned **Arnavut Köftesi** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-531 6652; Mürsel Paşa Caddesi 155, Balat; 🕒 8am-4pm), which is justly famous for its *köfte* (meatballs) and *piyaz* (white-bean salad). It's to the left of the ferry stop on the opposite side of the main road.

Hasköy to Sütlüce

Passing the derelict remains of the original Galata Bridge on its journey, the ferry crosses to the opposite shore and stops next at Hasköy, home to the fascinating **Rahmi M Koç Müzesi** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-369 6600; www.rmk-museum.org.tr; Hasköy Caddesi 27, Hasköy; adult/child & student TL8/4, submarine adult/child & student TL4.50/3; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun). Founded by the head of the Koç industrial group to exhibit artefacts from İstanbul's industrial past, this museum is as popular with children as it is with adults and is well worth a visit. It's directly to the left of the ferry stop.

After stopping at Ayvansaray on the opposite shore, the ferry crosses back to Sütlüce. Art-lovers should consider getting off at Sütlüce and catching bus 36T, 47, 47Ç or 47E to Bilgi Üniversitesi, home to the cutting-edge **Santralİstanbul** (☎ 0212-444 0428; www.santralistanbul.org; Kazım Karabekir Caddesi 1, Eyüp; admission free; 🕒 10am-8pm Tue-Sun). Housed in a converted power station, it's one of the best contemporary art galleries in the city. Check the website for what's on. If you're keen to make your way back to Taksim from here, the gallery provides a free shuttle bus leaving every 20 minutes from mid-morning to 8pm.

Eyüp

The ferry's last stop is across the water in Eyüp. This conservative suburb is built around the **Eyüp Sultan Camii & Türbe** (Camii Kebir Sokak, Eyüp; 🕒 tombs 9.30am-4.30pm), one of the most important religious sites in Turkey. The tomb supposedly houses the remains of Ayoub al-Ansari (Eyüp

Ensari in Turkish), a friend of the Prophet's and a revered member of Islam's early leadership. Eyüp fell in battle outside the walls of Constantinople while carrying the banner of Islam during the Arab assault and siege of the city from 674 to 678. The mosque built next to his tomb was where the Ottoman princes came for their coronations – it was levelled by an earthquake in 1766 and the present mosque was built in its place. It's a popular place for boys to visit on the day of their circumcision and is always busy on Fridays and on religious holidays. To get here, cross the road from the ferry stop and walk up İskele Caddesi, the main shopping street, until you reach the mosque.

After visiting the mosque and tomb, many visitors head north up the hill to enjoy a glass of tea and the wonderful views on offer at the **Pierre Loti Café** (☎ 0212-581 2696; Gümüşsuyu Balmumcu Sokak 1, Eyüp; 🕒 8pm-midnight), where the famous French novelist is said to have come for inspiration. To get here, walk out of the mosque's main gate and turn right. Walk around the complex (keeping it to your right) until you see a set of stairs and a steep cobbled path winding uphill through the Eyüp Sultan Mezarlığı (Cemetery of the Great Eyüp), burial ground to many important Ottoman figures. Alternatively, a cable car (TL1.40 each way, Akbil accepted) travels from the waterfront to the top of the hill.

Getting There & Away

Haliç ferries leave Eminönü every hour from 7.50am to 8.10pm; the last ferry returns to Eminönü from Eyüp at 7.45pm. The ferry trip takes 35 minutes and costs TL1.40 per leg (slightly cheaper if you use Akbil). Check www.ido.com.tr for timetable and fare updates.

If you wish to return by bus rather than ferry, then 36E, 44B, 99 and 399B travel from outside the ferry stop at Eyüp via Balat and Fener to Eminönü. Buses 39 and 39B travel via Edirnekapı to Beyazıt, allowing you to stop and visit the Chora Church (see p113) on your way back.

To return to Taksim from Hasköy or Sütlüce by bus, catch the 36T or 54HT. For Eminönü, catch bus 47, 47Ç or 47E.

Bus tickets cost TL1.40 per leg.

Hamams

A visit to a hamam is a quintessential Turkish experience, and İstanbul's hamams are famous

throughout the country. 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 their gorgeous historic surrounds and their squeaky-clean maintenance. And as most of their clients are tourists having their first hamam experience, you won't feel out of place. Allow at least an hour. For more information about bath etiquette see boxed text, p46.

Built over three centuries ago, **Cağaloğlu Hamamı** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-522 2424; www.cagalogluhamami.com.tr; Yerebatan Caddesi 34; bath services TL30-100; ☎ 8am-10pm men, 8am-8pm women) is the city's most beautiful hamam. The surroundings are simply exquisite. 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 a pleasant café as well as a shop selling quality olive-oil soap and other hamam accessories. Be warned that the attendants here can be both inventive and persistent when it comes to soliciting for tips.

The **Çemberlitaş Hamamı** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-522 7974; www.cemberlitashamami.com.tr; Vezir Hanı Caddesi 8, Çemberlitaş; bath services TL29-79; ☎ 6am-midnight) was designed by Sinan in 1584 and is also gorgeous. Like Cağaloğlu, it's a double hamam (separate baths for men and women); it has a splendid original *camekan* in the men's section and a recently restored/rebuilt one in the women's section. As well as an array of bath treatments, it offers facials and oil massages. Tips are included in the prices and there's a discount for ISIC holders.

The **Ambassador Hotel Spa Center** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-512 0002; www.hotelambassador.com; Ticarethane Sokak 19, Sultanahmet; Turkish bath with soap & oil massage TL82, remedial & aromatherapy massages TL20-50; ☎ noon-11pm Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat & Sun), in a shabby modern hotel just off Divan Yolu, might lack atmosphere but its bath and massage packages are excellent and you get the pretty (but small) hamam all to yourself. The 75-minute Turkish massage treatment gives you the same package that you get in the big hamams (bath, scrub and soap massage), but adds a 30-minute oil massage after the bath. You can also book the hamam for private use (TL37 per person per hour).

Yeşildirek Hamamı (Map pp94-5; Tersane Caddesi 74, Azapkapı; bath TL20, with massage TL30; ☎ 6am-9pm), located at the base of the Atatürk Bridge, is

the city's best gay hamam (men only). It's spacious, well-maintained and has all the traditional trappings. Be discreet.

Swimming

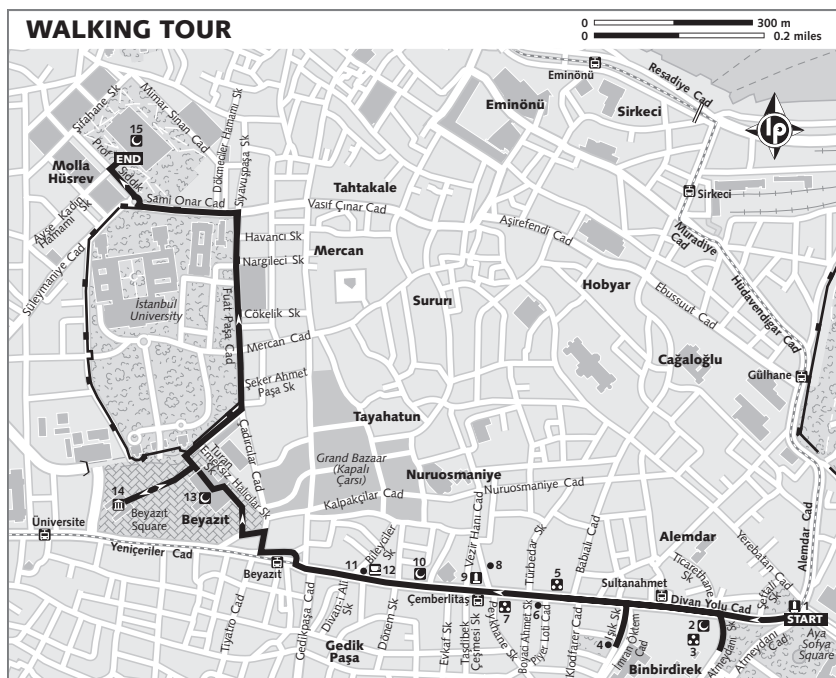
Swimming in the Bosphorus is only an option for those who have a death wish. Those with a hankering for the water can head to the beaches at Yeşilköy and Florya (you can get to these by train from Sirkeci and Cankurtaran stations) – but only to paddle. The water around the Princes' Islands is relatively clean, though the tiny beaches are crammed bottom-to-bottom in summer. The best option, if you really want to go to the beach, is to visit Kilyos or Şile on the Black Sea coast; both are day trips from İstanbul by bus.

Most of İstanbul's pool facilities are privately owned and open to members only. However, it's possible to organise a day pass to use the leisure facilities at many of the city's luxury hotels, most of which are located on or overlooking the Bosphorus. Be warned, though: this will set you back a hefty TL100 to TL200 per day (weekdays are usually cheaper than weekends). The best pools are at the **Swissôtel İstanbul the Bosphorus** (Map p97; ☎ 0212-326 1100; Bayıldım Caddesi 2, Maçka; ☎ 8am-7pm), the **İstanbul Hilton** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-315 6000; Cumhuriyet Caddesi, Harbiye; ☎ 8am-8pm), **Hotel Les Ottomans** (☎ 0212-359 1500; Muallim Naci Caddesi 68, Kureçesme; ☎ 9am-7pm) and the **Çırağan Palace Hotel Kempinski** (Map p97; ☎ 0212-326 4646; Çırağan Caddesi 32, Beşiktaş; ☎ 7am-11pm).

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. Now sad and sorry looking, this was the marble milestone from which all distances in Byzantium were measured. The tower beside it was once part of the Aqueeduct of Valens (p113), 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)**; p102).



WALK FACTS

Start Milion, near Basilica Cistern

Finish Süleymaniye Camii

Distance 1.5km

Duration two hours

Back on Divan Yolu, you'll see an impressive enclosure at the corner of Babıalî Caddesi, which is a cemetery housing the **tombs (5)** of the Ottoman high and mighty. There's a pleasant *çay bahçesi* (p149) here.

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; opposite)**.

The column in the small plaza in front of the hamam entrance is the **Çemberlitaş (9)**, also known as the Banded Stone or Burnt Column. It was erected by Constantine in 330 to celebrate the dedication of Constantinople as capital of the Roman Empire and has been covered with hoardings and awaiting renovation for years. A bit further on is the **Atik Ali Camii (10)**, built in 1496 by a eunuch who was a 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; p149)**, a great place to enjoy a tea break and nargileh.

Continue along Yeniçeriler Caddesi until you see the **Beyazıt Camii (13; p110)**. Its *medrese* houses the **Museum of Turkish Calligraphic Art (14)**, which was closed for renovation when this book was being researched. After visiting 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 and the last stop on this tour, the **Süleymaniye Camii** (15; p110). Reward your efforts with a tea at Lale Bahçesi (p149) or a quick, tasty bite to eat at Tarihi Süleymani Yeli Kuru Fasulyeci (p137).

COURSES

Note that prices for courses are usually set in euros rather than TL.

Cooking

Cooking Alaturca (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-458 5919; www.cookingalaturca.com; Akbiyik Caddesi 72a, Sultanahmet) Owner Eveline Zoutendijk runs excellent, hands-on Turkish cooking classes (€60 per person) from her restaurant-cum-cooking school in Sultanahmet. The delicious results are enjoyed over a five-course lunch with drinks.

İstanbul Food Workshop (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-534 4788; www.istanbulfoodworkshop.com; Yıldırım Caddesi 111, Fener) A well-respected outfit running walking tours for foodies as well as cooking classes focusing on both Turkish and Ottoman cuisine.

Handicrafts

Caferaga Medresesi (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-513 3601; www.tkhv.org; Caferiye Sokak, Sultanahmet) This gorgeous building is the home of the Turkish Cultural Services Foundation, which runs courses for locals and travellers in techniques such as calligraphy, miniature painting, *ebru* (traditional Turkish marbling), binding and glass painting. Courses are organised into 2½-hour sessions one day per week over three months and cost TL360. It also occasionally organises day courses costing TL36.

Language

Taksim Dilmer (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-292 9696; www.dilmer.com; Tark Zafer Tunaya Sokak 18, Taksim) This is probably the best-known of the city's Turkish language schools. On offer are eight-week courses (96 hours total) costing €384; four-week courses (80 hours total) costing €320; 12-week weekend courses (72 hours) costing €288; and eight-week evening courses (72 hours) costing €288. Classes have a maximum of 14 students.

İSTANBUL FOR CHILDREN

Children of all ages will enjoy the **Rahmi M Koç Müzesi** (p125). The spooky **Basilica Cistern** (p101), with its upside-down heads on columns, 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 Hisari** (p122) – but beware of the steep stairs here, which have no barriers. On **Büyükdada** (p165)

and **Heybeliada** (p165), two of the Princes' Islands, you can hire bikes or circle the island in a *fayton* (horse-drawn carriage), which is lots of fun. The Mehter band playing at the **Askeri Müzesi** (p117) is usually a winner, too.

If you're staying in Sultanahmet, there are two small 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 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 **Ekinçioğlu Toys & Gifts** (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-522 6220; Kaçın Sokak 5; Eminönü; ☎ 9am-7pm). And there's a small shop in Beyoğlu: **Iyigün Oyuncak** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-243 8910; İstiklal Caddesi 415; ☎ 9am-9pm).

TOURS

Note that tour companies in İstanbul set their charges in euros rather than TL.

City Tours

İstanbul Vision/City Sightseeing bus (☎ 0212-234 7777; www.plantours.com; one-day ticket adult/student & 7-12yr/under 7yr €20/15/free) This is a naff hop-on-hop-off double-decker bus service with multi-language recorded commentary. 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 60 stops around town, but buses only run a few times a day. Departure times change regularly so double-check ahead of time. Expect traffic congestion on the Beyoğlu section.

İstamboul Insolite (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-241 2846; www.istanbulguide.net/insolite; Bahtiyar Sokak 6, Nişantaşı; full-day tours per person €50-150) This small agency runs a variety of offbeat tours including the intriguing 'superstitious İstanbul', a caravanserai tour, a walk through Fener and Balat, and a 'forgotten churches' tour. English, German and French are spoken.

Kirkit Voyage (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-518 2282; www.kirkit.com; Amiral Tafdil Sokak 12, Sultanahmet; half- & full-day tours €23-50) This small agency specialises in small-group walking tours of the must-see sights as well as 'İstanbul the Unusual Way' and 'Asian İstanbul and its markets' tours. English and French are spoken.

Les Arts Turcs (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-458 1318; www.lesartsturcs.com; 3rd fl, İncili Çavuş Sokak 37, Sultanahmet; ☎ 10am-8pm) If you've ever wanted to learn *ebru*, 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 observing a dervish *sema* at a *tekke* in Fatih (€25), taking private Turkish lessons (€100 to €150 for a 2- to 3-hour crash course), and joining walking tours of the city's historic neighbourhoods (€50 to €85). It has a second office at İshakpaşa Caddesi 6, Cankurtaran, next to the entrance to Topkapı Palace.

Senkron Travel Agency (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-638 8340; www.senkrontours.com; Arasta Bazaar 51, Sultanahmet; full-day tours €25-60 per person; 🕒 8am-9pm) This professional outfit offers 10 different tours, including a day tour of the Bosphorus and Dolmabahçe Palace and one of the Christian highlights of the city.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

During the warmer months İstanbul is buzzing with arts and music 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 p151). Headline events include the following:

April

International İstanbul Film Festival (www.iksv.org/film) Held early in the month, the program includes retrospectives and recent releases from Turkey and abroad.

International İstanbul Tulip Festival The city's parks and gardens are resplendent with tulips from late March to early April each year.

June

Efes Pilsen One Love (www.pozitif-ist.com) This two-day music festival held at Santralİstanbul (p125) features international headline acts playing everything from punk to pop, electronica to disco.

International İstanbul Music Festival (www.iksv.org/muzik) The city's most famous arts festival.

July

International İstanbul Jazz Festival (www.iksv.org/caz) The number-one jazz festival in town is an intriguing hybrid of conventional jazz, electronica, world music and rock.

August

Electronica Festival İstanbul (www.electronicafest.com, in Turkish) This popular two-day festival at Park Orman features international DJs and live electronica acts duelling it out on open-air stages.

September

International İstanbul Biennial (www.istfest.org) The city's major visual-arts shindig takes place from early September to early November in odd-numbered years.

October

Akbank Jazz Festival (www.akbanksanat.com) This boutique event features traditional and avant-garde jazz, as well as Middle Eastern fusions and a program of young jazz.

November

Efes Pilsen Blues Festival (www.pozitif-ist.com) This long-running event tours nationally and stops for a two-day program in İstanbul.

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 well-priced 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 the 8% 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 any 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.

Note that all hotels in İstanbul set their prices in euros, and we have listed them as such here.

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

Sultanahmet & Around

The Sultan Ahmet Camii (Blue Mosque), gives its name to the quarter surrounding it. This is the heart of Old İstanbul and is 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 Çemberlitas) are supremely convenient. The area's only drawbacks

are the number of carpet touts around and the lack of decent bars and restaurants.

BUDGET

Mavi Guesthouse (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-517 7287; www.maviguesthouse.com; Kutlugün Sokak 3, Sultanahmet; rooftop mattress/dm/d €8/12/36; 📺) The management at Mavi is very friendly, which is just as well since some rooms at this tiny place are cramped and windowless, and all have extremely uncomfortable beds. Die-hard backpackers might want to claim one of the 24 mattresses that are squeezed onto the decrepit rooftop and share one shower and toilet. Breakfast is served downstairs or at street-side tables, and there's a kitchen for communal use. Avoid the double rooms – they're ridiculously overpriced.

Bahaus Guesthouse (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-638 6534; www.travelistanbul.com; Kutlugün Sokak 3, Cankurtaran; dm €15, d with/without bathroom €50/40; 📺) When it comes to hostels, word of mouth is the most reliable gauge of quality. And this place generates great word of mouth. Friendly and knowledgeable staff run a professional operation that's miles away from the institutional feel of some of its nearby and much larger competitors. Dorms have bunks with good mattresses and curtains to provide a skerrick of privacy; some have their own bathroom and all have ceiling fans. There's one shared bathroom for every seven beds and a constant supply of lukewarm water. Top marks go to the rooftop terrace bar.

Sultan Hostel (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-516 9260; www.sultanhostel.com; Akbiyık Sokak 21, Cankurtaran; dm €14, d with/without bathroom €44/38; 📺) Next door to – and clearly in hot competition with – the Orient, this place has recently undergone a renovation. As a result, it offers accommodation that is far more comfortable than that provided by its raffish neighbour. The freshly painted dorms have new bunk beds and good mattresses; linen is clean and crisp and towels are provided. Shared bathrooms are very clean and there are female-only dorms for those gals who want to steer clear of smelly socks. The pick of the rooms on offer is number 48, a double with lovely Sea of Marmara views and its own cubicle bathroom. Views from the terrace bar aren't as impressive as those at the Orient, but its set-up is much more relaxed and stylish. There's a 10% discount for HI cardholders.

Orient International Hostel (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-518 0789; www.orienthostel.com; Akbiyık Caddesi 13,

Cankurtaran; dm €14, s without bathroom €30, d with bathroom €70; 📺) Always packed to the rafters with backpackers, the Orient should only be considered if you're young, don't care about creature comforts and are ready to party. There's a shower for every 12 guests, and an array of dorms, some of which are light and relatively quiet and others that are unpleasantly dark and have the most uncomfortable mattresses that we've ever encountered (and considering our job, that's really saying something). The cheapest option is a barracks-style 30-bed dorm. The rooftop terrace bar has fabulous views and is a good place to relax, unlike the noisy cafeteria and internet area (they're great meeting places, though). Private rooms are ludicrously overpriced for what they offer.

our pick Hotel Peninsula (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-458 6850; www.hotelpeninsula.com; Adliye Sokak 6, Cankurtaran; s/d €35/45; 📺) The management of this unassuming hotel could quite possibly be the friendliest we've ever encountered. And we're talking friendly in a good, nonpushy, we-really-like-meeting-people type of way, not the hi-I'm-your-new-best-friend-please-visit-my-carpet-shop kind of way. There are 12 comfortable rooms with private bathroom here, as well as a lovely terrace with sea views and comfortable hammocks. The breakfast room has traditional low stools and brass tables, and the owner's mum makes cakes, jam and yoghurt for everyone's breakfast. Great value.

Side Hotel & Pension (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-517 2282; www.sidehotel.com; Utangaç Sokak 20, Cankurtaran; hotel s/d €50/70, pension s/d without bathroom €30/40, pension s/d with bathroom €40/50, 2-/4-person apt €85-110; 📺) This sprawling place offers rooms that are clean and comfortable, but lack atmosphere. Those in the hotel have satellite TVs and basic bathrooms; the pension alternatives (some of which are noisy) come with either shared or private facilities. There are also fully equipped but dark apartments sleeping one to six people. Meagre breakfasts are served at the pleasant rooftop garden-lounge. Note that air-con costs an extra €10 per room per night.

MIDRANGE

Hanedan Hotel (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-516 4869; www.hanedanhotel.com; Adliye Sokak 3, Cankurtaran; s €40, d €60-65; 📺) Pale lemon walls and polished wooden floors give the Hanedan's rooms a

light and elegant feel, as do the white marble bathrooms and firm beds covered with crisp white linen. A pleasant roof terrace overlooks the sea and Aya Sofya.

Hotel Alp Guesthouse (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-517 7067; www.alpguesthouse.com; Adliye Sokak 4, Cankurtaran; s/d €45/65; ☒ ☑) The Alp lives up to its location in Sultanahmet's premier small-hotel enclave, offering a range of attractive and well-equipped rooms at remarkably reasonable prices. Rooms have four-poster beds with white linen and gold hangings, wooden floorboards scattered with rugs, and extras such as satellite TV and work desks. The spacious front rooms are the pick of the bunch. The roof terrace is lovely, with great sea views and comfortable indoor and outdoor set-ups.

Hali Hotel (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-516 2170; www.halihotel.com; Klodfarer Caddesi 20, Çemberlitaş; s/d €45/75; ☑) All the rugs in Turkey couldn't hide this hotel's institutional feel. That said, it's worth considering because of the amazing views from the roof terrace, the huge bathrooms and its very quiet position. Third and fourth-floor rooms have views of the Sea of Marmara and Aya Sofya.

Hotel Alaturka (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-458 7900; www.hotelalaturka.com; Akbiyik Caddesi 5, Cankurtaran; s €70, d €85-105; ☒ ☑) Large rooms with mod cons such as minibars and satellite TVs are the hallmarks of this immaculately maintained hotel. The decor is conservative, but pleasantly so, and the roof terrace has one of the best views in the area.

Hotel Şebnem (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-517 6623; www.sebnemhotel.net; Adliye Sokak 1, Cankurtaran; s €70, d €90-100; ☑) Simplicity is the rule at the Şebnem, and it works a treat. Rooms have wooden floors, recently renovated bathrooms and comfortable beds. Framed Ottoman prints provide a touch of class. The large terrace upstairs has views over the Sea of Marmara (as do the more expensive double rooms), and downstairs rooms face onto a pretty private courtyard garden. Breakfast is good here, too.

Hotel Ararat (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-516 0411; www.ararathotel.com; Torun Sokak 3, Cankurtaran; r €75-110; ☒ ☑) The Ararat is tiny, but its charming host Haydar Sarigul and cosy rooftop terrace-bar in the shadow of the Blue Mosque make it a popular choice. Dark wooden floors, textile bedspreads and clever space-enhancing mirrors are the decorative hallmarks; quality linen and homemade *börek* (savory pastry) for

breakfast are quality touches. It's not worth paying the extra euros for a room with a view, particularly as the two terrace rooms are the smallest in the hotel.

Hotel Poem (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-638 9744; www.hotelpoem.com; Terbiyik Sokak 12; s €55, d €80-150; ☒ ☑) Many guests end up waxing lyrical about their stays in this cute hotel. Rooms are named after poems by well-known Turkish poets, and the tranquil rear garden is a perfect spot to linger over an anthology and a glass of tea. Some rooms are on the small side and lack style; others have huge beds, balconies and sea views. All are clean and have amenities such as satellite TV and hairdryer.

Hotel Uyan İstanbul (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-518 9255; www.uyanhotel.com; Utangaç Sokak 25, Cankurtaran; s €50, d standard/deluxe €99/150; ☒ ☑) The Uyan offers comfortable and attractive rooms with a good range of amenities. The elegant decor nods towards the Ottoman style, but never goes over the top – everyone will feel comfortable here. The view from the spacious roof terrace is one of the best in the area and the breakfast buffet is generous.

Tan Hotel (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-520 9130; www.tanhotel.com; Dr Emin Paşa Sokak 20, Alemdar; s/d €85/100; ☒ ☑) This well-run hotel off Divan Yolu is a showcase of understated modern style and high-level service. Everything here is brand spanking new; rooms are generously sized and bathrooms are excellent (all have Jacuzzis). There's even a terrace bar sporting excellent views of the Blue Mosque, Aya Sofya and the Sea of Marmara. We love the lavish breakfast buffet, too.

Hotel Nomade (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-513 8172; www.hotelnomade.com; Ticarethane Sokak 15, Alemdar; s €75, d €90-105; ☒ ☑) Mega style and budget pricing don't often go together, but the Nomade bucks the trend. Just a few steps off busy Divan Yolu, the hotel's 16 small rooms and three suites have great bathrooms, stylish bedlinen and satellite TV. With one of the best roof-terrace bars in town (smack-bang in front of Aya Sofya) and a Philippe Starck feel, this place is about as hip as Sultanahmet gets.

Sari Konak Oteli (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-638 6258; www.istanbulhotelsarikonak.com; Mimar Mehmet Ağa Caddesi 42-46, Cankurtaran; r standard/deluxe €99/129, ste €199; ☒ ☑) The Sari Konak is a truly classy joint. Its spacious deluxe rooms are beautifully decorated with soothing colour schemes, top-notch linens and attractive prints, embroideries and etchings on the walls; the standard

rooms are considerably smaller, but are just as attractive; and the suites are total knockouts – perfect for families. Guests enjoy relaxing on the roof terrace with its Sea of Marmara and Blue Mosque views, but seem to be equally partial to hanging out in the downstairs lounge and courtyard.

ourpick Hotel Empress Zoe (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-518 2504; www.emzoe.com; Adliye Sokak 10, Cankurtaran; s €75, d €110-135, ste €120-240; ☒ ☑ ☒) Named after the feisty Byzantine empress whose portrait adorns the gallery at Aya Sofya, this fabulous place is owned and managed by American Ann Nevens and her sister Cristina, who really know their stuff when it comes to running a boutique hotel. All rooms and suites are individually and charmingly decorated, and although some rooms in the main building are tiny, these are available at discounted rates (single/double €55/65). There's a gorgeous flower-filled garden where breakfast is served and a rooftop lounge-terrace with excellent views.

Ottoman Hotel Imperial (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-513 6150/1; www.ottomanhotelimperial.com; Caferiye Sokak 6/1; standard s/d €100/120, superior s/d €200/240; ☒ ☑ ☒) This four-star choice is in a wonderful location just outside the Topkapı Palace walls. Once the city's main youth hostel, the building has been extensively renovated and features large rooms decorated with Ottoman-style ceramics, textiles and *ebru*. Comfort and amenity levels are high, and some rooms have Aya Sofya views. No roof terrace, but there's a lovely rear garden with restaurant and bar instead.

Kybele Hotel (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-511 7766; www.kybelehotel.com; Yerebatan Caddesi 35, Alemdar; s €80, d €110-140; ☒ ☒) The gilded exterior of this small hotel reflects the decor inside, which features hundreds of coloured lights, wooden floors covered in rugs, and antique furniture and curios. Run by three brothers in a personable and professional style, it's got bucketloads of charm and lots of added extras, including a great café/bar, a charming rear garden patio and a library for guests. Rooms, which feature cute marble bathrooms, are smallish but comfortable.

Ayasofya Konakları (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-513 3660; www.ayasofyakonaklari.com; Soğukçeşme Sokak; s €120-140, d €170-200; ☒ ☒) If you're keen to play out Ottoman fantasies, come here. Picturesque Ayasofya Konakları is set in a row of 19th-century wooden houses occupying an entire cobbled street abutting Topkapı Palace. Choose from a total of 63 rooms, all of which are comfortable and charmingly decorated.

Breakfast is served in a glass conservatory complete with chandeliers.

İbrahim Paşa Oteli (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-518 0394; www.ibrahimpasha.com; Terzihane Sokak 5, Binbirdirek; r standard/deluxe €125/175; ☒ ☑ ☒) No doubt İbrahim Paşa would have given the nod to this mod Ottoman renovation borrowing his name. Successfully combining Ottoman style with contemporary decor, this boutique hotel has been keeping guests happy for a number of years now and looks as if it will increase its popularity now that its new, purpose-built extension with impressive terrace bar has opened.

TOP END

Sirkeci Konak (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-528 4344; Taya Hatun Sokak 5, Sirkeci; r €190-320; ☒ ☑ ☒) This terrific hotel overlooking Gülhane Parkı opened in 2007. The owners run other hotels in the Sirkeci neighbourhood and know what keeps guests happy – rooms are all large and well equipped, with extras such as tea- and coffee-making equipment, satellite TV, quality toiletries and luxe linen. There's also a wellness centre with pool, gym and hamam in the basement – a rarity on this side of town. Top marks go to the complimentary afternoon teas and Anatolian cooking lessons.

Tria Hotel İstanbul (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-518 4518; www.triahotelistanbul.com; Turbiyik Sokak 7, Cankurtaran; s €180, d standard/ superior €218/280; ☒ ☑ ☒) The old adage that handsome is as handsome does certainly apply to the Tria. Extremely comfortable and quiet rooms offer tea-and-coffee making equipment, flat-screen TV, work desk and large bed; all are attractively decorated with polished floorboards, silk curtains, embroidered bedspreads and objets d'art. There's a comfortable lounge on the ground floor and a roof terrace with great views. Prices plummet in low season.

Four Seasons Hotel İstanbul (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-638 8200; www.fourseasons.com; Tevkifhane Sokak 1, Sultanahmet; r €280-500; ☒ ☑ ☒) What used to be the infamous Sultanahmet prison (remember *Midnight Express*?) is now one of İstanbul's swankiest hotels. Known for its service (extraordinary), history (deliciously disreputable), location (right in the heart of Old İstanbul) and rooms (wow), it's the king of the city's hotels. Its new sister establishment on the Bosphorus at Beşiktaş might be one of the only İstanbul hotels capable of knocking it off its long-held throne.

Beyoğlu & Around

Most travellers to İstanbul stay in Sultanahmet, but Beyoğlu is becoming a popular alternative. Stay here to avoid the touts in the old city, 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 – the exception being an ever-increasing number of stylish apartment hotels and apartment rentals. These often command spectacular Bosphorus and Golden Horn views – something you pay for by having to climb six or seven floors of stairs.

Getting to/from the historical sights of Old İstanbul from Beyoğlu is easy: you can either walk across the Galata Bridge (approximately 45 minutes), or catch the Taksim Sq–Kabataş funicular and tram.

BUDGET

World House Hostel (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-293 5520; www.worldhouseistanbul.com; Galipedede Caddesi 117, Galata; dm €10-13, d €38; ☒ ☑) Hostels in İstanbul are usually impersonal hulks with jungle-like atmospheres, but World House is small, friendly and calm. Best of all is the fact that it's close to Beyoğlu's restaurant, bar and club scene, but not *too* close – meaning that it's possible to grab a decent night's kip here. The eight-bed dorms are clean and light, with good mattresses and decent linen. Bathrooms are in plentiful supply and there's a cheerful café on the ground floor.

International House (Map pp94-5; ☎ 212-244 3773; www.ihouseistanbul.com; 5 Zambak Sokak, Beyoğlu; dm €8.50-13, d €39; ☒ ☑) The young and enthusiastic owners of World House Hostel also run a second hostel, just off İstiklal Caddesi. This one is right in the thick of the action, so steer clear if you're a light sleeper.

MIDRANGE

Büyük Londra Oteli (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-245 0670; www.londrahotel.net; Meşrutiyet Caddesi 117, Tepebaşı; unrenovated s €35-60, unrenovated d €50-80, renovated s/d €75/85; ☒) The highlight of the 1892 Büyük Londra is its wonderfully preserved lounge, which has barely been touched since it hosted well-heeled passengers fresh off the *Orient Express*. We love the ruffled curtains dangling with tassels, the decorated 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 where

our enthusiasm falters. Some of the rooms are musty and worn (very *Addams Family*). Book one that's been recently renovated – these have air-con and are comfortable.

Vardar Palace Hotel (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-252 2888; www.vardarhotel.com; Siraselviler Caddesi 16, Taksim; s €46-69, d €85-96; ☒ ☑) This hotel just off Taksim Sq offers excellent value for money and so is well worth considering. Rooms at the rear are darkish and quiet, front rooms are light but face onto a noisy nightclub strip – all are very clean and come with cable TV. There's a roof terrace with great views.

Eklektik Guest House (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-243 7446; www.eklektikgalata.com; Kadırbey Ckımazi 4, Galata; r €95-115; ☒ ☑) Advertising itself as offering 'the first and only gay accommodation in İstanbul', this gay-owned-and-managed place offers seven individually decorated rooms with satellite TV. You can enact fantasies in the Pasha Room, chill out after a big night in the Zen Room or just feel funky in the Retro Room. Think about booking one of the more expensive rooms, as these have the best bathrooms. The staff here are both friendly and helpful.

Manzara İstanbul (☎ 0212-252 4660; www.manzara-istanbul.com/en; office 2nd fl, Galata Kulesi Sokak 3; apt per night €65-160) Turkish/German architect and artist Erdoğan Altındağ has stylishly renovated 14 residential apartments around Galata, Cihangir and Kabataş that he rents out to holiday makers. Sleeping between one and six people, these offer well-priced alternatives to hotels in the area. A number of the apartments have extraordinary Bosphorus views, some have wi-fi and a couple have air-con.

İstanbul Holiday Apartments (☎ 0212-251 8530; www.istanbulholidayapartments.com; apt per night €115-260, minimum stay 3 or 7 nights; ☒ ☑) Saying that holiday apartments in İstanbul are easy to find is like saying the sultans were celibate, which is why the ever-expanding portfolio of apartments run by American Ann Taboroff Uysel is as unique as it is welcome. Now in locations as diverse as Galata, Cihangir, Taksim, Şişli and Beşiktaş, these handsome apartments sleeping between one and seven people are perfect for city sojourns of three days or more. All are fitted out with washer/drier, good kitchens, CD players and satellite TVs; some have air-con and/or dishwashers and some have knock-'em-dead views over the Golden Horn and Bosphorus.

TOP END

Anemon Galata (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-293 2343; www.anemonhotels.com; cnr Galata Meydanı & Büyükhendek Caddesi, Galata; s/d €120/140; ☒ ☑ ☐) Located on the attractive square that's been built around Galata Tower, this wooden building dates from 1842 but has been almost completely rebuilt inside. Individually decorated rooms are extremely elegant, featuring ornate painted ceilings, king-sized beds and antique-style desks. Large bathrooms have baths and marble basins. Best of all is the restaurant, which boasts one of the best views in the city. Book well ahead and request a room with a view.

ourpick Istanbul Suites (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-393 7900; www.wittistanbul.com; Defterdar Yokuşu 26, Cihangir; ste per night €150-290; ☑) Opened in 2008, this stylish apartment hotel is a real find. Just up the hill from the Tophane tram stop in the trendy suburb of Cihangir, it has 15 suites with fully equipped marble kitchenettes, seating areas with flat-screen satellite TVs, CD/DVD players, king-sized beds and huge bathrooms (Molton Brown toiletries). Some suites look over to the old city and the top-floor gym has a panoramic view of the Bosphorus. There's a café and 24-hour reception; weekly and long-term rates are available.

Richmond Hotel (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-252 5460; www.richmondhotels.com.tr; İstiklal Caddesi 445, Tünel; s €149-175, d €159-199, ste €279; ☒ ☐ ☑) Next to the palatial Russian consulate, the Richmond has a fabulous location right on the city's major boulevard. Behind its 19th-century facade, the place is modern, quite comfortable and well run. Standard rooms are comfortable and well set up, and the suites are knock-outs, with modernist decor, excellent views, great workstation, Jacuzzi and plasma TV. Best of all is the fact that one of the best bars in the city (Leb-i Derya Richmond) is on the top floor, meaning that your bed will only be a short stagger away. A mainly business clientele keeps the place busy, so book ahead.

Marmara Pera (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-251 4646; www.themarmarahotels.com; Meşrutiyet Caddesi 1, Tepebaşı; standard s/d €140/160, superior s/d €210/240; ☒ ☑ ☐ ☑ ☐) This funky little sister of the landmark hotel in Taksim Sq opened in 2004 and has been a popular choice with glam globetrotters ever since. Rooms are smallish but extremely well appointed, featuring quality touches such as a magazine selection, pillow menu and stylish white linen. Stand-out amenities include one of the best restaurants in the city (Mikla,

see p139), a rooftop pool bar with spectacular views, and a 24-hour fitness centre. It's worth paying extra for a room on a higher floor with sea view. Breakfast costs an extra €20.

Beşiktaş & Ortaköy

TOP END

Radisson SAS Bosphorus Hotel (Map p97; ☎ 0212-310 1500; www.radissonsas.com; Çırağan Caddesi 46, Ortaköy; r standard/superior €220/255, ste €510; ☒ ☑ ☐ ☑) Stay here if you're in town to party at the Bosphorus superclubs. Prominently located on the Golden Mile, it offers 120 well-sized and very comfortable rooms, some of which have Bosphorus views and all of which share the modern style that the Radisson chain is known for. There's a spa and wellness centre on site (no pool, though), as well as a branch of the London-based Japanese restaurant, Zuma. Breakfast costs an extra €20.

W Istanbul (Map p97; ☎ 0212-381 2121; www.whotels.com/istanbul; Süleyman Seba Caddesi 22, Akaretler; r €300-432, ste €560-10,590; ☒ ☑) Opened in 2008, this uberstylish 'design hotel' is located between the glam shopping district of Nişantaşı and the party precinct along the Bosphorus. Though the setting is historic (the 1890s building housed domestic staff working at Dolmabahçe Palace), the renovation here is unrelentingly modern and highly theatrical. Rooms have good work desks, comfortable beds and fabulous bathrooms with hamam-influenced showers. There's an Estee Lauder day spa, a fitness centre and a branch of New York's Spice Market restaurant. Breakfast costs an extra €12 to €24.

EATING

İstanbul is a food-lover's paradise. Teeming with affordable fast-food joints, cafés and restaurants, it leaves visitors spoiled for choice when it comes to choosing a venue. Unfortunately, Sultanahmet has the least impressive range of eating options in the city. Rather than eating here at night, we recommend crossing the Galata Bridge and joining the locals in Beyoğlu, Ortaköy and the Bosphorus suburbs. Absolutely nothing can beat the enjoyment of spending a night in a *meyhane* on Nevizade Sokak or in the Asmalımescit quarter (both in Beyoğlu), or dining at one of the swish restaurants on the Bosphorus. There are other pockets of town worth investigating – Eminönü has the enjoyable Hamdi Et Lokantası and Zinhan Kebap

House, Samatya is home to the best kebaps in town at Develi, and Edirnekapı has the excellent Asitane – but on the whole you will be well served by making your way across the Galata Bridge every night.

If you are planning to take a ferry trip to Üsküdar, Kadıköy, the upper reaches of the Bosphorus or the Golden Horn, we have listed dining recommendations in the Asian Shore (p119) and Ferry Cruises (p121) sections.

Close to Sultanahmet there are a number of small supermarkets. The best is **Greens** (Map pp92-3; Nuruosmaniye Sokak 1, Çağaloğlu; ☎ 7am-8.30pm). Beyoğlu also has many small supermarkets (including Gima) open daily; most are along Siraselvililer Caddesi, running off Taksim Sq.

Sultanahmet & Around RESTAURANTS

Sefa Restaurant (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-520 0670; Nuruosmaniye Caddesi 17, Çağaloğlu; mains TL6.50-16; ☎ 7am-5pm) Locals rate this place on the way to the Grand Bazaar highly, and after sampling the simple dishes on offer you'll understand why. You can order from an English-language menu or choose from the bain-marie. Try to arrive early for lunch because many of the dishes run out by 1.30pm.

Buhara Restaurant & Ocakbaşı (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-527 5133; Nuruosmaniye Caddesi 7a, Çağaloğlu; kebaps TL10-17; ☎ 11am-10pm) If you're craving a kebab and haven't the time or inclination to walk down the hill to Eminönü's Hamdi Et Lokantası (p136) or Zinhan (p137), this unassuming eatery might be the solution. Management can be gruff and the servings are on the small side, but the quality of the meat is consistently good.

Kir Evi (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-512 6942; Hoca Rüstem Sokak 9; mains TL16.50-21; ☎ 10.30am-2.30am) We were in two minds as to whether we should include this place, but the infectious exuberance of its management and the enormous amount of fun that customers were having when we visited ruled in its favour. Meals are worthy of comment for their size and reasonable price rather than their quality, but the biggest draw is the entertainment. The owner and waiters serenade guests with everything from Donna Summer disco anthems to emotional Turkish arabesk numbers, and everyone joins in (well, they do after the second and third bottle of wine has been opened at their table). Not the place for a romantic dinner.

Dubb (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-513 7308; İncili Çavuş Sokak, Alendar; mains TL12-24; ☎ noon-3pm & 6-10.30pm) One of İstanbul's few Indian restaurants, Dubb specialises in mild tandoori dishes, but also serves a large range of fragrant curries, including vegetarian options. Its outdoor terrace on the 4th floor offers fabulous views of Aya Sofya.

Cooking Alaturca (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-458 5919; www.cookingalaturca.com; Akbiyik Caddesi 72a, Sultanahmet; set lunch TL40; ☎ lunch only; ☒) This great little restaurant is run by Dutch-born foodie Eveline Zoutendijk, who both knows and loves Anatolian food. She serves a set four-course menu that changes daily according to what produce is in season and what's best at the local markets. Eveline says that she aims to create a little haven in the midst of carpet-selling frenzy and she has indeed done this. She also sells unusual and authentic produce such as homemade jams, pomegranate vinegar and *pekmez* (grape molasses), as well as cook books and Turkish cooking utensils.

Sarniç (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-512 4291; Soğukçeşme Sokak; mains TL20-30; ☎ 7-11pm) It's not every day you get to dine in a wonderfully atmospheric candle-lit Byzantine cistern, so we're listing Sarniç despite the fact that its food can be somewhat disappointing. Book ahead.

Teraz Restaurant (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-638 1370; Hotel Armada, Ahırkapı Sokak, Cankurtaran; mains TL20-34; ☎ 7-11pm) The chef at this upmarket hotel restaurant came up with an inspired idea when he devised his Turkish degustation menu (TL58). Six sampling courses of 'İstanbul cuisine' feature and are complemented by an excellent and affordable wine list. You can also order from the à la carte menu – the fish is particularly good. Book a terrace table with a Blue Mosque view.

Balıkçı Sabahattin (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-458 1824; Seyit Hasan Koyu Sokak 1, Cankurtaran; mains TL25-60; ☎ noon-midnight; ☒) The limos outside Balıkçı Sabahattin pay testament to its enduring popularity with the city's establishment, who join hoards of cashed-up tourists in enjoying its limited menu of meze and fish. The food here is excellent, though the service can be harried. You'll dine in a wooden Ottoman house or under a leafy canopy in the garden. It's wise to book.

Giritli (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-458 2270; Keresteci Hakkı Sokak, Cankurtaran; set menus TL75; ☎ 11am-11pm) Bring a big appetite to enjoy Giritli's set banquet menu, which offers over 10 types of hot and

cold meze, octopus, fish and more. Alcohol is included in the price, but don't expect the quality of the tipples to match that of the excellent Cretan fare it accompanies. Summer dining is in a courtyard; in winter, patrons dine in a rickety wooden house.

CAFÉS

Çiğdem Pastanesi (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-526 8859; Divan Yolu Caddesi 62a; ☎ 8am-11pm) Çiğdem Pastanesi has been serving locals since 1961 and it's still going strong. The *ay çöreği* (pastry with a walnut, sultana and spice filling) is the perfect accompaniment to a cappuccino and the *su böreği* (soft cheese *börek*) goes wonderfully well with a cup of tea or fresh juice.

Hafız Mustafa Şekerlemeleri (Map p109; ☎ 0212-526 5627; Hamidiye Caddesi 84-86, Eminönü; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Sat) Choosing between the delicious *baklava*, tasty *börek* or indulgent *meşhur tekirdağ peynir helvası* (a cheese-based sweet prepared with sesame oil, cereals and honey or syrup) is the challenge that confronts customers at this popular place in Eminönü. You can enjoy your choice with a glass of tea in the upstairs café.

Java Studio (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-517 2378; Dalbastı Sokak 13; ☎ 7am-11pm) Celebrating the 'fine art of coffee', this laid-back café in the shadow of the Blue Mosque offers an extensive list of coffees, teas, milkshakes and lassis, accompanied by freshly baked cakes. There's comfortable seating, chess and backgammon, free wi-fi and a book exchange.

QUICK EATS

Nominating the best take-away döner kebab in Sultanahmet is a hard ask; all we'll say is that many locals are keen on the *döner* (TL4 to TL9) served at **Sedef Meşhur Dönerci** (Map pp92-3), just up from the McDonald's on Divan Yolu. It's only open during the day.

Caferaga Medresesi (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-513 3601; Cafariye Sokak; soup TL3, köfte TL10; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) In Sultanahmet, it's rare to nosh in stylish surroundings without paying through the nose for the privilege. That's why this teensy *lokanta* in the gorgeous courtyard of this Sinan-designed *medrese* near Topkapı Palace is such a find. The food isn't anything to write home about, but it's fresh and keenly priced.

Tarihi Sultanahmet Köftecisi Selim Usta (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-520 0566; Divan Yolu Caddesi 12; ☎ 11am-11pm) Don't get this place confused with the other *köfte* (meatball) places along this strip

purporting to be the *meşhur* (famous) *köfte* restaurant – No 12 is the real McCoy. Locals flock here to eat the signature *köfte* (TL7) served with white beans (TL4), pickled chillies and salad (TL4).

Karadeniz Aile Pide ve Kebap Salonu (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-528 6290; Hacı Tahsin Bey Sokak 1; pide TL7-8.50, kebaps TL7-11; ☎ 11am-11pm) This long-timer off Divan Yolu serves a delicious *mercimek* (lentil soup) and is also a favourite for its pide (Turkish pizza). You can claim a table in the utilitarian interior, but most people prefer those on the cobbled lane.

Karadeniz Aile Pide & Kebap Sofrası (☎ 0212-526 7202; Dr Emin Paşa Sokak 16; ☎ 11am-11pm) Opposite and equally welcoming.

Bazaar District

RESTAURANTS

Havuzlu Restaurant (Map p109; ☎ 0212-527 3346; Gani Çelebi Sokak 3, Grand Bazaar; mains TL9-12; ☎ 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 and ornate central light-fitting, Havuzlu serves up tasty and reliable fare to hungry hordes of tourists and shopkeepers. It also has a clean toilet, something quite rare in the bazaar.

Bab-ı Hayat (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-520 7878; Mısır Çarşısı 47, Eminönü (Spice Bazaar); pides TL6.50-7.50, kebaps TL8-12.50; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) It took seven months for a team headed by one of the conservation architects from Topkapı Palace to restore and decorate this vaulted space over the eastern entrance to the Spice Bazaar. The result is an atmospheric setting in which to enjoy well-priced, unadorned Anatolian dishes. Enter through the Serhadoglu fast-food shop.

Hamdi Et Lokantası (Hamdi Restaurant; Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-528 0390; www.hamdirestorant.com.tr; Kalın Sokak 17, Eminönü; kebaps TL13-18; ☎ noon-11pm) A favourite İstanbullu haunt since 1970, Hamdi's phenomenal views overlooking the Golden Horn and Galata are matched by great kebaps, professional service and a bustling atmosphere. Book online as far ahead of your meal as possible and request a spot on the terrace.

Şehzade Mehmed Sofrası (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-526 2668; www.sehzademehmed.com.tr; Şehzadebaşı Caddesi, Fatih; pides TL8-10, grills TL10-19; ☎ 9am-11pm) Located in the magnificent *küllüye* of the historic Şehzade Mehmed Sofrası Camii, this welcoming restaurant and *çay bahçesi* serves

KEBAP KINGS

If Turkey has a signature dish, it has to be the kebab. Turks will tuck into anything cooked on a stick with gusto, and if asked where they would like to celebrate a special event, they will inevitably nominate one of the city's two most-famous *kebaçis*: Develi and Beyti.

- **Develi** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-529 0833; Gümüşyüzük Sokak 7, Samatya; mains TL12-25; 🕒 noon-midnight) opened its first restaurant in Kuruluş in 1912, but its most popular outlet is at Samatya, in the shadow of Theodosius' Great Wall. The succulent kebaps here come in many guises and often reflect the season – the *keme kebabi* (truffle kebab) is only served for a few weeks each year, for instance. Prices here are extremely reasonable for the quality of food that is on offer, and the service is exemplary. Catch the train from Sirkeci or Cankurtaran and get off at Koca Mustafa Paşa station.
- **Beyti** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-663 2990; Orman Sokak 8, Florya; mains TL27-34; 🕒 noon-midnight Tue-Sun) is located in an affluent suburb way out near the airport, but serious meat lovers know that it's worth the trip. Mr Beyti's famous *kuzu şiş* (skewered lamb kebab) and other meat dishes are extraordinarily good and worth every *kuruş* (cent) of their relatively hefty price tags. Catch the train from Sirkeci or Cankurtaran and get off at Florya station.

simple but tasty meals (no alcohol). There's live Turkish music most evenings at 7pm and you're welcome to come just for a tea and nargileh if you so choose.

Zeyrekhane (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-532 2778; www.zeyrekhane.com; İbedethane Arkası Sokak 10, Zeyrek; mains TL22-30; 🕒 9am-10pm Tue-Sun) This fine-dining establishment in the restored former *medrese* of Zeyrek Camii (p113) also has an outdoor garden and terrace with magnificent views of the Golden Horn and back to the Süleymaniye mosque. It serves beautifully presented and well-executed Ottoman-influenced food in extremely attractive surrounds.

Zinhan Kebab House at Storks (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-512 4275; rezervasyon@zinhan-kebab-house.com; RagıpGümüştapa Caddesi 2-5, Eminönü; kebaps TL12.50-21; 🕒 noon-11pm Mon-Sat) Zinhan's regal position next to the Galata Bridge (p112) is one of the best in the city. Its top-floor roof terrace offers sensational views and is an excellent place to enjoy a tasty kebab and salad meal served in elegant and extremely comfortable surrounds. Book ahead and request a table with a view.

CAFÉS

Fez Cafe (Map p109; ☎ 0212-527 3684; Halıcılar Caddesi 62, Grand Bazaar; 🕒 11.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Set in a rough-stone den, the popular Fez is one of the only Western-style cafés in the Grand Bazaar. The flower-adorned tables are perfect spots to people-watch while having a drink and bite to eat (sandwiches are the speciality and the coffee is excellent).

QUICK EATS

İmren Lokantası (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-638 1196; Kadirga Meydanı 143, Kadirga; mains TL3.50-7; 🕒 7am-10.30pm) A tiny neighbourhood *lokanta* with extremely friendly staff, İmren is well off the tourist trail but is worth the walk. It serves excellent, dirt-cheap dishes such as peppery lamb *guveç* (stew) or *musakka* (baked aubergine and mincemeat). Go for lunch rather than dinner.

Namli (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-511 6393; Hasırcılar Caddesi 14, Eminönü; 🕒 7am-7pm Mon-Sat) Namli's mouth-watering selection of cheeses, *pastırma* (air-dried beef) and *meze* are known throughout the city. Fight your way to the counter and order a tasty fried *pastırma* roll or a takeaway container of *meze*. In-the-know customers eat what they've bought upstairs in the cafeteria, where you can also grab a tasty light lunch. There's another branch on Rıhtım Caddesi in Karaköy (Map pp94-5; open 7am to 10pm).

Tarihi Süleymani Yeli Kuru Fasulyeci (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-513 6219; Prof Sıddık Sami Onar Caddesi 11, Süleymaniye; fasulye & pilav TL6.50; 🕒 11am-4pm Mon-Sat) Join the crowds of hungry locals at this long-time institution in the former *kütüphanesi medrese* (theological-school library) of the Süleymaniye Camii. It has been dishing up its spicy signature *fasulye* (broad bean) dish for more than 80 years. Try it with *ayran* (yoghurt drink).

Western Districts

Asitane (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-534 8414; www.asitane-restaurant.com; Kariye Camii Sokak 6, Edirnekapı; mains TL24-32; 🕒 11am-midnight) This elegant restaurant next to

THE FISH SANDWICH – AN İSTANBUL INSTITUTION

The cheapest way to enjoy fresh fish from the waters around İstanbul is to buy a fish sandwich from a boatman. Go to the Eminönü end of the Galata Bridge and you'll see food stands next to the quay selling fried fresh fish crammed into a quarter loaf. In each boat, men tend to a cooker loaded with fish fillets. The quick-cooked fish is crammed into a quarter loaf of fresh bread and served with some salad. It will set you back a mere TL3.50 or so. Delicious!

the Chora Church serves the most authentic Ottoman cuisine in town. The chefs here have tracked down recipes from the imperial kitchens of the Topkapı, Edirne and Dolmabahçe palaces, which they prepare using original ingredients and cooking methods. Lunch here is as delicious as it is unique.

Beyoğlu & Around

RESTAURANTS

Refik (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-243 2834; Sofyalı Sokak 10, Tünel; mezes TL4-8, mains TL10-16; ☎ 11am-1am, closed lunch Sun) Refik is the original *meyhane* in the happening Asmalımescit precinct, and it's always full of liquored-up locals enjoying well-cooked Black Sea fish and decent meze. Join them and you're bound to have a good time.

Boncuk Restaurant (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-243 1219; Nevizade Sokak 19; mezes TL4-8, mains TL10-16; ☎ 11am-1am) Armenian specialities differentiate Boncuk from its Nevizade Sokak neighbours. Try the excellent, superfresh *topik* (meze made from chickpeas, pistachios, onion, flour, currants, cumin and salt). Arrive early and book ahead to get a table on the street, which is where all the action occurs.

our pick Sofyalı 9 (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-245 0362; Sofyalı Sokak 9, Tünel; mezes TL4-8, mains TL10-16; ☎ 11am-1am Mon-Sat) Tables here are hot property on Friday and Saturday night, and no wonder. This gem of a place serves up some of the city's best *meyhane* food, and does so in surroundings as welcoming as they are attractive. Regulars swear by the *Arnavut ciğeri* (Albanian fried liver), fried fish and exceptionally fine meze.

Kahvedan (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-292 4030; Akarsu Caddesi 50, Cihangir; www.kahvedan.com; breakfast plates TL7-12, soups TL5-6, wraps TL9-14, mains TL13-21; ☎ 9am-

2am Mon-Fri, 9am-4am Sat & Sun) This expat haven serves dishes such as bacon and eggs, French toast, *mee goreng* and falafel wraps. Owner Shellie Corman is a traveller at heart, and knows the importance of things such as free wi-fi, decent wine by the glass, keen prices and good music.

Kiva Han (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-292 9898; www.galatakivahan.com; Galata Kulesi Meydanı 4, Galata; mains TL6-10; ☎ 7.30am-8pm) In the shadow of Galata Tower, this simple but stylish *lokanta* specialises in seasonal dishes from the different regions of Turkey. Inspect the dishes on display or peruse the menu – the food is as excellent as it is unusual. No alcohol, but the filtered coffee served in individual plungers (TL5) is a great way to end the meal.

Tarihi Karaköy Balık Lokantası (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-251 1371; Kardeşim Sokak 30, off Tersane Caddesi, Karaköy; fish soup TL6, mains TL18-25; ☎ 11.30am-3.30pm Mon-Sat) Walk through the run-down quarter behind the Karaköy Fish Market and you'll come across this unassuming treasure, one of the few old-style fish restaurants remaining on the Golden Horn. Everything is so fresh it's almost writhing – the fish baked in paper is a taste sensation and the dirt-cheap fish soup is the best in town. No alcohol.

our pick Gani Gani Şark Sofrası (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-244 8401; www.naumpasakonagi.com; Taksim Kuyu Sokak 11; pides TL7-9.50, kebaps TL7.50-10; ☎ 10am-11pm) Young Turkish couples love lolling on the traditional Anatolian seating at this cheap and friendly eatery. If you'd prefer to keep your shoes on, you can claim a table and chair on the first floor to enjoy excellent kebaps, rich *mantı* (Turkish ravioli topped with yoghurt, tomato and butter, TL7) and piping-hot pide. No alcohol.

our pick Hacı Abdullah (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-293 8561; Sakızagaç Caddesi 9a; www.haciabdullah.com.tr; mains TL9-18; ☎ 11am-11pm; ☒) Just thinking about Hacı Abdullah's sensational *imam bayıldı* (eggplant stuffed with tomatoes, onions and garlic and slow cooked in olive oil) makes our taste buds go into overdrive. This İstanbul institution (it was established in 1888) is one of the city's best *lokantas*, and is one of the essential gastronomic stops you should make when in town. No alcohol.

Zencefil (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-243 8234; Kurabiye Sokak 8; mains TL10-12; ☎ 11am-11pm Tue-Sun) This popular vegetarian café is comfortable and quietly stylish. Try the daily and weekly specials to get crunchy-fresh produce (all or-

ganic) and guilt-free desserts. The slabs of homemade bread are a highlight.

Doğa Balık (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-293 9144; info@dogabalik.com; 7th fl, Villa Zurich Hotel, Akarsu Yokuşu Caddesi 36, Cihangir; mezes TL10-20, mains TL25-60; ☎ noon-midnight) There's something awfully fishy about this place – and the locals love it. On the top floor of a modest hotel in Cihangir, Doğa Balık serves fabulously fresh fish in a dining space with wonderful views across to the old city. It also has a lavish serve-your-own meze buffet.

Kafe Ara (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-245 4104; Tosbağ Sokak 8a; mains TL13-18; ☎ 8am-midnight) In the Beyoğlu popularity stakes this café stands head and shoulders above the rest. A funky converted garage with tables and chairs spilling out into a wide laneway opposite the Galatasaray Lycée, it's a casual and welcoming setting in which to enjoy well-priced paninis, salads and pastas. No alcohol.

White Mill (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-292 2895; www.whitemillcafe.com; Susam Sokak 13, Cihangir; breakfast plate TL17-19, mains TL15-23; ☎ 9.30am-1.30am) White Mill serves up tasty (often organic) food in industrial-chic surrounds. In fine weather, the huge and shady rear garden is a wonderful spot in which to enjoy a leisurely weekend breakfast. It's also a great bar.

Hünkâr Lokantası (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-225 4665; Mim Kemal Öke Caddesi 21, Nişantaşı; mains TL15-20; ☎ noon-midnight) After a morning spent abusing your credit card in the upmarket shops

around here, you'll be ready to claim a table at this highly regarded *lokanta* and enjoy a relaxed lunch and glass of wine. The chefs take enormous pride in cooking and presenting traditional foods supremely well – everything is delicious. It's a 20-minute walk from Taksim Sq.

It's a Joke (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-373 2300; 5th fl, City's Nişantaşı Mall, Teşvikiye Caddesi 162, Teşvikiye; mains TL15-27; ☎ noon-midnight) This restaurant/bar in the City Nişantaşı shopping mall was so full when we last visited that people were literally swinging from the ceiling (clutching mirror balls). If it stays this hot, we fear that it and its rich-young-the-pizza clientele may self-combust. Food is of the pizza and burger variety. To get here catch a metro to Osmanbey from Taksim and then walk down Rumeli Caddesi.

Cezayir (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-245 9980; Hayriye Caddesi 16, Galatasaray; mains TL15-25; ☎ noon-11.30pm) Housed in an attractive building that was once home to an Italian school, Cezayir is heavy on charm and relatively light on the wallet. The food is Mod Med with Turkish influences and the crowd is upmarket boho. In summer, the courtyard is always packed with happy diners.

our pick Mikla (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-293 5656; mikla@istanbuliyi.com; Marmara Pera Hotel, Meşrutiyet Caddesi 15, Tepebaşı; mains TL36-46.25; ☎ noon-3pm & 7pm-1am Mon-Fri, 7pm-1am Sat) This is the city's best restaurant – bar none. Local celebrity chef Mehmet Gürs is a master of perfectly executed Mediterranean

MEYHANE – THE BIGGEST PARTY IN TOWN

If you only have one night out on the town when you're in Istanbul, make sure you spend it at a *meyhane* (Turkish tavern). On every night of the week, *meyhanes* such as **Refik** (opposite), **Boncuk** (opposite) and **Sofyalı 9** (opposite) are full of groups of chattering locals choosing from the dizzying array of meze and fish dishes on offer, washed down with a never-ending supply of rakı (aniseed brandy). On Friday and Saturday nights, *meyhane* precincts such as Nevizade and Sofyalı Sokaks literally heave with people and are enormously enjoyable places to be.

Traditional *meyhanes* often host musicians playing *fasıl*, a lively local form of gypsy music. The best of these *meyhanes* is **Despina** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-247 3357; Açıköy Sokak 9, Kurtuluş; meze TL4-6, mains TL10; ☎ noon-12.30am Mon-Sat, music 8.30pm-midnight most nights), which was established back in 1946 and is known for its excellent music. It's way off the well-beaten tourist track and is hard to find – so ask your hotel to organise a taxi. Other options include **Cumhuriyet** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-293 1977; Sahne Sokak 4; mezes TL5-7, mains TL10-25; ☎ 9am-2am, music 8.30pm-midnight most nights) in Beyoğlu's Balık Pazar (Fish Market); and **Andon** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-251 0222; Siraselviler Caddesi 51, Taksim; set menus incl alcohol TL60; ☎ 2pm-4am Mon-Sat, live music 9pm-2am most nights) situated just off Taksim Sq.

If you eat at a *meyhane* where there's live music make sure you tip the musicians when they play at your table, as they work for tips rather than salary. Between TL5 to TL10 for each person at the table is about right.

cuisine, and the Turkish accents he employs make his food truly memorable. Extraordinary views, luxe surrounds and exemplary service complete the experience.

CAFÉS

İnci (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-243 2412; İstiklal Caddesi 124, Beyoğlu; ☎ 9am-9pm) İstanbul's naughty secret is to sidestep into vintage İnci for a sinful fix of the city's best profiteroles (TL5), and then to reappear on İstiklal as if nothing ever happened.

ourpick Karaköy Güllüoğlu (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-293 0910; Rıhtım Caddesi, Katlı Otopark Altı, Karaköy; porsiyons TL2.75-4.50; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat) The Güllü family opened its first baklava shop in Karaköy in 1949, and it has been making customers deliriously happy and dentists obscenely rich ever since. Go to the register and pay for a glass of tea and *porسیون* (portion) of whatever baklava takes your fancy (*fıstıklı* is pistachio, *cevizli* is walnut and *sade* is plain). You then queue to receive a plate with between two or three pieces, depending on the type you order. The *börek* (TL4 to TL4.50) here is also exceptionally fine.

Saray Muhallebicisi (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-292 3434; İstiklal Caddesi 173, Beyoğlu; ☎ 7.30am-10pm) This *muhallebici* (milk-pudding shop) is owned by İstanbul's mayor, no less. It's been dishing up puddings since 1935 and is always packed with locals scratching their heads over which of the 35-odd varieties of sweets they want to try this time. Try the *firin sultaç* (rice pudding), *aşure* (dried fruit, nut and pulse pudding) or *kazandibi* (slightly burnt chicken-breast pudding).

QUICK EATS

Canım Çiğirim İlhan Usta (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-252 6060; Minare Sokak 1, Asmalimescit; set meal TL10; ☎ 10am-midnight) The name means 'my soul, my liver', and this small place behind the Ali Hoca Türbesi specialises in a set meal of grilled liver served with herbs, *ezme* (spicy tomato sauce) and grilled vegetables. If you can't bring yourself to eat offal, fear not – you can substitute liver with beef if you so choose. No alcohol.

Güney Restaurant (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-249 0393; Kuledibi Şah Kapısı 6, Tünel; soups TL3, mains TL3.50-18; ☎ Mon-Sat) You'll be lucky if you can fight your way through the crowds of hungry locals to claim a lunchtime table at this bustling *lokanta* opposite Galata Tower. The food is nothing special, but the friendly and efficient service compensates.

Konak (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-252 0684; www.konak.kebab.com; İstiklal Caddesi 259, Galatasaray; pides TL6.50-7.50, kebaps TL8-15; ☎ 7.30am-11.30pm) Eateries on İstiklal are often dreadful, but this long-time favourite bucks the trend. It serves excellent kebaps and pides; try the delectable İskender kebab and follow up with a serving of Turkey's famous but hard-to-find Maraş ice cream and you'll be both happy and replete. There's another branch near Tünel, but this one is much better.

Beşiktaş & Ortaköy

Eateries on and around the Golden Mile can get pricey, and if you're on a tight budget you should probably limit yourself to brunch – like most young locals do. On weekends the stands behind the Ortaköy Camii do brisk business selling *gözleme* (savory pancakes) and *kumpir* (baked potatoes filled with your choice of sour cream, olive paste, cheese, chilli or bulgur).

Aşk Kahve (Map p97; ☎ 0212-265 4734; Muallim Naci Caddesi 64b, Kuruçeşme; brunch TL10-20; ☎ 9am-10pm, closed Mon in winter) The city's glamour set loves this garden café to bits, and its weekend brunches are an institution. Go early to snaffle a table right at the water's edge. It's accessed via the stairs behind the Macrocenter. To get here from Sultanahmet catch the tram to Kabataş and then bus 22 or 25E to Kuruçeşme.

House Café (Map p97; ☎ 0212-261 5818; İskele Sq 42, Ortaköy; breakfast platters TL24, sandwiches TL17.50-23.50, pizzas TL16.50-28.50; ☎ noon-2am) This casually chic café is one of the best spots in town for Sunday brunch. A huge space right on the waterfront, it offers a good-quality buffet spread for TL45 between 9am and 2pm. Food at other times can be disappointing, though that doesn't deter the locals, who flock here every weekend.

Banyan (Map p97; ☎ 0212-259 9060; www.banyan.restaurant.com; 3rd fl, Salhane Sokak 3, Ortaköy; mains TL24-39; ☎ 11am-midnight) The excellent Asian food served at this stylish eatery is nearly as impressive as its view of the Bosphorus Bridge and Ortaköy Mosque. The terrace is a wonderful place to enjoy a romantic dinner or a well-priced three-course fixed-menu lunch (TL40).

DRINKING

It may be the biggest city in a predominantly Islamic country, but let us assure you that İstanbul's population likes nothing more than a drink or three. If the raki-soaked atmosphere

(Continued on page 149)

(Continued from page 140)

in the city's *meyhanes* isn't a clear enough indicator (p139), a foray into the thriving bar scene around Beyoğlu will confirm it.

Alternatively, you can check out the alcohol-free, atmosphere-rich *çay bahçesi* or *kahvehanes* (coffeehouses) dotted around the old city. These are great places to relax and sample that great Turkish institution, the nargileh, accompanied by a cup of *Türk kahvesi* (Turkish coffee) or *çay*. This will cost around TL1.50 for a tea and TL8 to TL13 for a nargileh at all of the places listed here.

Tea Gardens & Coffeehouses

SULTANAHMET & AROUND

Set Üstü Çay Bahçesi (Map pp92-3; Gülhane Parkı, Sultana Ahmet; ☎ 10am-11pm) Locals adore this terraced tea garden and every weekend they can be seen parading arm-in-arm through Gülhane Parkı to get here. Follow their example and you can enjoy a pot of tea and a *tost* (toasted sandwich) while enjoying spectacular water views. No nargileh.

Yeni Marmara (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-516 9013; Çayiroğlu Sokak, Küçük Ayasofya; ☎ 8am-midnight) This cavernous teahouse is always packed with locals playing backgammon, sipping *çay* and puffing on nargilehs. 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.

Derviş Aile Çay Bahçesi (Map pp92-3; Mimar Mehmet Ağa Caddesi; ☎ 9am-11pm Apr-Oct) Locations don't come any better than this. Directly opposite the Blue Mosque, the Derviş' comfortable cane chairs and shady trees beckon patrons in need of a respite from the tourist queues.

Café Meşale (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-518 9562; Arasta Bazaar, Utangaç Sokak, Cankurtaran; ☎ 24hr) Generations of backpackers have joined locals in claiming a stool and enjoying a *çay* and nargileh here. In the summer months there's live Turkish music at night. You'll find it in the sunken courtyard behind the Blue Mosque and next to the Arasta Bazaar.

Türk Ocağı Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi İktisadi İşletmesi Çay Bahçesi (cnr Divan Yolu & Babıyalı Caddesi, Çemberlitaş; ☎ 8am-midnight, later in summer) Tucked into the rear right-hand corner of a shady Ottoman cemetery, this popular tea garden is a perfect place to escape the crowds and relax over a tea and nargileh.

CRAZY ABOUT KEYIF

Tea and nargileh go together like Fred and Ginger or Posh and Becks. And the best setting in which to try out this particularly magic combo is the traditional *çay bahçesi* (tea garden), of which Istanbul has many. These *çay bahçesi* are where the locals go to practice *keyif*, the Turkish art of quiet relaxation. To emulate them, follow the smell of apple tobacco to the following faves:

- **Derviş Aile Bahçesi** (left)
- **Erenler Çay Bahçesi** (below)
- **Lale Bahçesi** (below)
- **Tophane Nargileh** (p150)

BAZAAR DISTRICT

Erenler Çay Bahçesi (Map pp90-1; ☎ 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 and develop a major tobacco addiction, this nargileh place is set in the leafy courtyard of the Çorlulu Ali Paşa Medrese.

Etham Tezçakar Kahveci (Map p109; Halıçılar Caddesi, Grand Bazaar; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) This teeny tea and coffee stop is smack-bang in the middle of Halıçılar Caddesi. Its traditional brass-tray tables and wooden stools stand in stark contrast to the funky Fez Café opposite. No nargileh.

İlesam Lokalı (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-511 2618; Yeniçeriler Caddesi 84; ☎ 8am-midnight, later in summer) This club in the courtyard of the Koca Sinan Paşa Medrese was formed by the enigmatically named Professional Union of Owners of the Works of Science and Literature. Fortunately, members seem happy for strangers to infiltrate their ranks. After entering the gate to Koca Sinan Paşa's tomb, go past the cemetery – it's the second teahouse to the right.

Lale Bahçesi (Map pp90-1; Sifահane Sokak, Süleymaniye; ☎ 9am-11pm) In a sunken courtyard that was once part of the Süleymaniye *külliye*, this charming tea garden is always full of students from the nearby İstanbul University, who come here to spend a lazy hour or two on cushioned seats alongside a pretty fountain. In winter the students huddle inside the atmospheric kilim-clad *medrese*.

Şark Kahvesi (Map p109; ☎ 0212-512 1144; Yağlıkcılar 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. No nargileh.

BEYOĞLU & AROUND

Haco Pulo (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-244 4210; Passage ZD Hazzopulo, İstiklal Caddesi; ☎ 9am-midnight) There aren't nearly as many traditional teahouses in Beyoğlu as there are in atmospheric Old İstanbul, so this one is treasured by the locals. Set in a delightfully picturesque cobbled courtyard, it's stool-to-stool 20- to 30-somethings on summer evenings. Walking from İstiklal Caddesi through the skinny arcade crowded with offbeat shops adds to the experience.

Kahve Dünyası (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-293 1206; Meclis-i Mebusan Caddesi, Tütün Han 167, Tophane; ☎ 7.30am-9.30pm; ☎) The name means 'coffee world', and this new coffee chain has the local world at its feet. The secret of its success lies with the huge coffee menu, decent snacks, reasonable prices, delicious chocolate spoons (yes, you read that correctly), comfortable seating and free wi-fi. The filter coffee is better than its espresso-based alternatives. It's near the Kabataş tram. There's another branch in Nuruosmaniye Caddesi in Cağaloğlu, near the Grand Bazaar. Neither offers nargileh.

ourpick Tophane Nargileh (Map pp94-5; off Necatibet Caddesi, Tophane; ☎ 24hr) This atmospheric row of nargileh cafés behind the Nusretiye Mosque and opposite the Tophane tram stop is always packed with trendy teetotallers. Follow your nose to find it – the smell of apple tobacco is incredibly enticing.

Bars

SULTANAHMET

Put simply, there isn't a bar scene in Sultanahmet. Most of the drinking spots worth considering are in hotels.

Just Bar (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0532-409 6369; Akbiyik Caddesi 18, Cankurtaran; ☎ 10am-2am) Slap-bang in the middle of backpacker central, this Sultanahmet fixture offers chilled streetside drinking and a late-night knees-up if there are plenty of travellers in town. Cheers Bar, next door, offers more of the same.

Sofa (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-458 3630; Mimar Mehmet Ağa Caddesi 32, Cankurtaran; ☎ 11am-11pm) Ten candlelit tables beckon patrons into this friendly café/bar just off Akbiyik Caddesi. There's a happy

hour between 5pm and 6.30pm each day, and a decidedly laid-back feel. The food's adequate rather than inspired, but if you're only after something cheapish to soak up the alcohol you'll be happy enough with what's on offer.

Sultan Pub (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-511 5638; Divan Yolu Caddesi 2; ☎ 9.30pm-1am) This local version of Ye Olde English Pub has been around for yonks. The 30-to-40ish crowds come for spectacular sunsets on the rooftop terrace or peerless people-watching from the sun-drenched streetside tables.

Kybele Cafe (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-511 7766; Yerebatan Caddesi 35, Alemdar; ☎ 3pm-1am) The lounge bar at this charming but vaguely eccentric hotel is chock-full of antique furniture, richly coloured rugs and old etchings and prints, but its signature style comes courtesy of the hundreds of colourful glass lights hanging from the ceiling.

Hotel Nomade Terrace Bar (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-513 8172; Ticarethane Sokak 15, Alemdar; ☎ noon-11pm) The intimate terrace of this boutique hotel overlooks Aya Sofya and the Blue Mosque. Settle down in a comfortable chair to enjoy a glass of wine, beer or freshly squeezed fruit juice. The only music that will disturb your evening's reverie is the old city's signature sound of the call to prayer.

Yeşil Ev (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-517 6785; Kabasakal Caddesi; ☎ noon-10.30pm) The elegant rear courtyard of this Ottoman hotel is a true oasis for those wanting to enjoy a quiet drink. In spring, flowers and blossom fill every corner; in summer the fountain and trees keep the temperature down. It's pricey, though.

BEYOĞLU & AROUND

The most popular bar precincts are on or around Balo Sokak and Sofyalı Sokak, but there are also a number of sleek bars on roof terraces on both sides of İstiklal – these have fantastic views and prices to match.

Pasific House (Map pp94-5; Sofyalı Sokak, Asmalimescit; ☎ noon-2am) There are loads of bars in Beyoğlu, but not many that are both cheap and well located. This casual place on one of the city's most happening streets is a welcome exception.

Badehane (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-249 0550; General Yazgan Sokak 5, Tünel; ☎ 9am-2am) This tiny unsigned watering hole is a favourite with locals because of its cheap beer. On a balmy evening the laneway is crammed with chattering, chain-smoking artsy types sipping

ROOFTOP REVELRY

The prohibitively expensive superclubs along the Bosphorus are where the city's bronzed, Botoxed and blinged set glams up and gets down. Fortunately, there's an equally glamorous, but much more affordable, entertainment alternative that we can recommend: investigating the city's vibrant rooftop bar scene.

Istanbul's sensational skyline and wonderful waterways provide the perfect backdrop for a rapidly growing number of rooftop bars in Beyoğlu. Most offer spectacular views; some also provide live music, morphing into dance clubs after midnight. They rarely levy cover charges and their dress codes are relatively relaxed, though you should don the best your suitcase has to offer. Drinks average between TL15 to TL20.

The best of a rapidly growing crop include **360** (below), **5 Kat** (below), **Leb-i Derya** and **Leb-i Derya Richmond** (below), and **Nu Teras** (below).

a beer or three; when it's cold they squeeze inside. Dress down and come ready to enjoy an attitude-free evening.

Leyla (Map pp94-5; ☎ 012-245 4028; Tünel Sq 186a, Tünel; ☎ 7am-2am) After dominating Beyoğlu's bar scene from a location in Cihangir, ultra-popular Leyla has migrated to the other end of İstiklal and brought most of its trendy clientele along for the ride. A great location opposite the Tünel entrance means that it's a popular meeting place.

KeVe (Map pp94-5; ☎ 212-251 4338; Tünel Geçidi 10, Tünel; ☎ 8.30am-2am) Located in a plant-filled belle-époque arcade, atmospheric KeVe is invariably full of 30- to 40-somethings enjoying a drink before kicking on to an exhibition opening along İstiklal.

5 Kat (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-293 3774; www.5kat.com; 5th fl, Soğanç Sokak 7, Cihangir; ☎ 10am-1.30am) This Istanbul institution is a great alternative for those who can't stomach the style overload at 360 and the like. In winter, drinks are served in the boudoir-style bar; in summer, action moves to the outdoor terrace. Both have great Bosphorus views.

our pick 360 (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-251 1042; www.360istanbul.com; 8th fl, İstiklal Caddesi 311, Galatasaray; ☎ noon-2am Mon-Thu & Sun, 3pm-4am Fri & Sat) Istanbul's most famous bar, and deservedly so. If you can score one of the bar stools on the terrace you'll be happy indeed – the view is truly extraordinary. The place morphs into a club after midnight on Fridays and Saturdays.

Club 17 (Map pp94-5; Zambak Sokak 17; cover charge TL10 Fri & Sat only, incl 1 drink; ☎ 11pm-4am Sun-Thu, 11pm-5.30am Fri & Sat) Aggressive techno music and a jam-packed interior are the hallmarks of this popular gay bar. At closing time, there's a veritable meat rack outside.

Leb-i Derya (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-244 1886; www.lebiderya.com; 7th fl, Kumbaracı Yokuşu 115, Tünel; ☎ 11am-2am Mon-Fri, 8.30am-3am Sat & Sun) Ask many İstanbullus to name their favourite watering hole and they're likely to nominate this unpretentious place. On the top floor of a dishevelled building off İstiklal, it has wonderful views across to the old city and down the Bosphorus, meaning that seats on the small outdoor terrace or at the bar are highly prized. There's another, more upmarket branch in the Richmond Hotel on İstiklal Caddesi that has even better views.

Nu Teras (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-245 6070; www.istanbulnu.com; 6th fl, Meşrutiyet Caddesi 149, Tepebaşı; ☎ 6.30pm-2am Mon-Thu & Sun, 6.30pm-4am Fri & Sat Jun-Oct) This summer-only terrace bar is a great place for a sunset drink. Its view is unusual in that it focuses on the Golden Horn, but it's no less spectacular for that. It also functions as a restaurant.

ENTERTAINMENT

There's an entertainment option for everyone in Istanbul. With its array of cinemas and almost religious devotion to all forms of music, 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 Istanbul* (see p84) and check out **Biletix** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 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 at the **İstiklal Kitabevi** (Map pp94-5; İstiklal Caddesi 55, Beyoğlu; ☎ 10am-10pm). Alternatively, it's easy to buy

GAY & LESBIAN İSTANBUL

In the past the gay scene in Istanbul 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. The scene is changing though, and becoming more dynamic and accepted every day. Check www.istanbulgay.com for a general guide.

There seems to be a hot new gay bar or club opening in Beyoğlu every week, mainly around the Taksim Sq end of İstiklal Caddesi. Check our listings on p150 and below for a few recommendations, and see the Gay & Lesbian section in the monthly *Time Out İstanbul* to get updates.

There is an excellent gay-owned-and-run hotel in Beyoğlu (Eklektik Guest House, see p133), and a friendly and efficient tour company specialising in gay travel in Sultanahmet, **Pride Travel Agency** (☎ 0212-527 0671; www.turkey-gay-travel.com; 2nd fl, Ateş Pasajı, İncili Cavuş Sokak 33, Sultanahmet; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat).

Hamams are a gay fave, but the scene here is very discreet. The best-known gay hamams (men only) are **Ağa Hamamı** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-249 5027; Turnacıbaşı Sokak 66, Beyoğlu; bath TL20, with massage TL30; ☎ 5pm-5am), **Çeşme Hamamı** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-552 3441; Yeni Çeşme Sokak 9, Karaköy; bath TL15, with massage TL25; ☎ 8am-7pm) and **Yeşildirek Hamamı** (p126). There's also a popular gay sauna, **Aquarius** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-251 8925; Sadri Alikis Sokak 29, Beyoğlu; admission TL30, massage per hr TL50; ☎ 24hr).

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 İstanbul. The best place to do this is at a *meyhane* – see p139.

Nightclubs

İstanbul has a killer nightlife, and the best nightclubs are clustered in what is known as the 'Golden Mile' between Ortaköy and Kuruçeşme on the Bosphorus. This sybaritic strip is where world-famous clubs such as Reina and Sortie are located, and it's also where the city's live jazz scene has recently started to gravitate.

To visit any of the Golden Mile venues, you'll need to dress to kill and be prepared to outlay loads of lira – drinks start at TL20 for a beer and climb into the stratosphere for imported spirits or cocktails. Booking for the restaurants at these venues is a good idea, because it's usually the only way to get past the door staff – otherwise you'll be looking at a lucky break or a tip of at least TL100 to get the nod. Venues are busiest on Friday and – especially – Saturday nights, and the action doesn't really kick off until 1am or 2am.

The Beyoğlu clubs are cheaper, and relatively attitude free. They don't have the same wow factor, though.

BEYOĞLU & AROUND

Araf (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-244 8301; 5th fl, Balo Sokak 32; no cover charge; ☎ 5pm-4am) Grungy fun central

for English teachers and Turkish-language students, who shake their booties to the in-house gypsy band and swill the cheapest club beer in town.

Cahide Caberet (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-219 6530; Kadırgalar Caddesi, Maçka Parkı; www.cahidecabaret.com; tickets through Biletix or by emailing info@cahidecabaret.com, cover charge TL65 incl 1 drink; ☎ 11pm-late Apr-early Oct) Drag queens, divas and daddy's darlings all adore Cahide. It's kitsch, decadently enjoyable and ruinously expensive – consider yourself warned.

Ghetto (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0538-230 1500; www.ghettoist.com; Kalyoncu Kulluk Caddesi 10; cover charge varies; ☎ 8pm-4am) This three-storey club behind the Çiçek Pasajı (p115) has a bold postmodern decor and an interesting musical program featuring local and international acts. At Ghetto Teras (reached via a back staircase), techno and house music rule, presided over by DJs who really know their stuff.

Love Dance Point (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-296 3357; www.lovedancepoint.com; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 349/1, Harbiye; cover charge TL30 incl 1 drink; ☎ 11.30pm-4am Wed, 11.30pm-5am Fri & Sat) The major player in the city's gay club scene, Love is now in its eighth year and shows absolutely no sign of having its star wane. Here, gay anthems meet hard-hitting techno and Turkish pop, making for one hell of a party. Straights can occasionally be spotted on the dance floor.

ORTAKÖY & KURUÇEŞME

Angelique (Map p97; ☎ 0212-237 2844; www.istanbuldoors.com; Salhane Sokak 10, Ortaköy; no cover charge;

☎ 6pm-4am May-Oct) The cleverly positioned angled mirrors make the most of Angeliq's location right on the waterfront, ensuring that the few corners of the club without views of the Bosphorus Bridge and Ortaköy Mosque still bathe in their reflections. This is glam with a capital G – wear your Blahniks and make sure you make a reservation.

Blackk (Map p97; ☎ 0212-236 7256; www.blackk.net; Muallim Naci Caddesi 71, Kuruçeşme; no cover charge; ☎ 7.30pm-4am Fri & Sat) This ultrafashionable supper club is divided into three areas – club, resto-lounge and Levendiz Greek tavern. The club relies on its giant mirror ball for the wow factor, but both the resto-lounge and *meyhane* have great Bosphorus views.

Crystal (Map p97; ☎ 0212-229 7152; www.club.crystal.org; Muallim Naci Caddesi 65, Kuruçeşme; adult/student TL35/25 includes one drink; ☎ midnight-5.30am Fri & Sat) Crystal is home to the city's techno aficionados, who come to appreciate sets put together by some of the best DJs from Turkey and the rest of Europe. There's a great sound system, a crowded dance floor and a lovely covered garden. Best of all is the fact that there's less attitude evident here than at the rest of the Golden Mile clubs.

our pick **Reina** (Map p97; ☎ 0212-259 5919; www.reina.com.tr; Muallim Naci Caddesi 44, Kuruçeşme; cover charge TL50 on weekends, free on weekdays) This is İstanbul's most famous nightclub. It's where Turkey's C-list celebrities congregate, the city's nouveaux riches cavort and an occasional tourist gets past the doorman to ogle the spectacle and the magnificent Bosphorus view. Nearby Sortie (Map p97; www.sortie.com.tr) offers more of the same. You are highly unlikely to get into either without a dinner reservation.

Live Music

Babylon (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-292 7368; www.babylon.com.tr; Şehbender Sokak 3, Tünel; cover charge varies; ☎ 9.30pm-2am Tue-Thu, 10pm-3am Fri & Sat) Babylon devotes itself almost exclusively to live performances, and the eclectic program often features big-name international acts. DJ chill-out sessions are in the restaurant/lounge behind the concert hall. Buy tickets at the box office (open 10am-6pm) opposite the venue.

Balans Music Hall (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-251 7020; www.balansmusicall.com in Turkish; Balo Sokak 22; admission varies; ☎ closed summer, from 10pm Wed-Sat in winter) This three-level space has one of the best sound systems in town, and regularly hosts big- and small-name local rock bands.

It's a friendly, mixed crowd; join the crush up front to make friends fast. On the top floor is Tonique (www.balanstonique.com), a part open-air duplex where memorable electronic and house music plays and local scenesters congregate.

Nayah Cafe Bar (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-244 1183; Balo Sokak 14A, Galatasaray; cover charge varies; ☎ 10am-2am) This vibrant place is one of the few bars – if not the only bar – in İstanbul headlining reggae and world music. It's a second home to some of the city's African migrants and many other expats. Enter off Nevizade Sokak.

Roxy (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-249 1283; www.roxy.com.tr; Arslan Yatağı Sokak 7; cover charge varies; ☎ 9pm-3am Wed & Thu, 10pm-4am Fri & Sat) It's been going since 1994, but bright young things still flock to this dance-and-performance space off Taksim Sq. Expect anything from retro to rap, hip hop to jazz fusion and electronica to anthems.

Jazz

İstanbul Jazz Center (Map p97; ☎ 0212-323 5050; www.istanbuljazz.com; Salhane Sokak 10, Ortaköy; cover charge varies; ☎ from 7pm, live performances 9.30pm & 12.30am Mon-Sat) Affectionately known as JC's, this is the city's best-known jazz club. Big-name international acts regularly perform on Friday and Saturday nights – check the website for details. There's a set dinner menu costing TL60, or you can order à la carte.

Nardis Jazz Club (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-244 6327; www.nardisjazz.com; Galata Kulesi Sokak 14, Galata; cover charge varies; ☎ 8pm-1am Mon-Thu with sets at 9.30pm & 12.30am, 8pm-2am Fri & Sat with sets at 10.30pm & 1.30am) Just downhill from the Galata Tower, this venue run by jazz guitarist Önder Focan and his wife Zuhar is where real jazz aficionados go. It's small, so you'll need to book if you want a decent table.

our pick **Q Jazz by Les Ottomans** (☎ 0212-359 1500; www.lesottomans.com.tr; Hotel Les Ottomans, Muallim Naci Caddesi 68, Kuruçeşme; cover TL30; ☎ from 7pm, live performances from 11pm Mon-Sat) You'll feel like an Ottoman pasha when you come to this trendy jazz club, which is set in İstanbul's most opulent hotel. The views are magical and the bar menu is reasonably priced considering the luxe surrounds. The same can't be said about the drinks, though.

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. Tickets cost TL12 at most venues – many places offer reduced rates on Wednesday.

Decent cinemas include:

AFM Fitaş (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-251 2020; İstiklal Caddesi 24-26, Beyoğlu)

Citylife Cinema (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-373 3535; www.citylifecinema.com; 6th fl, City's Nişantaşı Mall, Teşvikiye Caddesi 162, Teşvikiye)

Emek (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-293 8439; Yeşilçam Sokak 5, Beyoğlu)

Rexx (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0216-336 0112; Sakızgülü Sokak 20-22, Kadıköy)

Şafak Sinemaları (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-516 2660; Divan Yolu 134, Çemberlitaş)

Sport

There's only one spectator sport that really matters to Turks: football. Eighteen teams from all over Turkey compete from August to May, and three of the top teams – Fenerbahçe, Galatasaray and Beşiktaş – are based in İstanbul. Each season three teams 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. Open seating is affordable; covered seating – which has the best views – can be expensive. If you miss out on the tickets you can get them at the door of the stadium, but they are usually outrageously overpriced.

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 (p109). Come here for jewellery, leather, textiles, ceramics and trinkets. And if you're still standing after a serious session in the Grand Bazaar, you may want to visit the **Arasta Bazaar** (p100) behind the Blue Mosque in Sultanahmet, which is home to an excellent range of carpet, textile and ceramic shops.

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** (p115) is lined with book and music shops. A few steps away is **Çukurcuma**, with some good antique shops.

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

Art, Antiques & Jewellery

Khaftan (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-458 5425; www.khaftan.com; Nakilbent Sokak 33; 🕒 9am-8pm) Owner Adnan Cakariz sells antique Kütahya and İznik ceramics to collectors and museums here and overseas, so you can be sure that the pieces he sells in his own establishment are top-notch. Gleaming Russian icons, delicate calligraphy (old and new), ceramics, Karagöz puppets and contemporary paintings are all on show in this gorgeous shop.

Sofa (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-520 2850; Nuruosmaniye Caddesi 85, Cağaloğlu; 🕒 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.

Design Zone (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-527 9285; www.designzone.com.tr; Alibaba Türbe Sokak 21, Nuruosmaniye; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Contemporary Turkish designers show and sell their work in this attractive jewellery boutique. Look out for the superstylish jewellery created by owner Özlem Tuna and unique collectables such as the hand-crafted hamam-bowl sets. The varied stock caters to all budgets.

Milano Güzelış (Map p109; ☎ 0212-527 6648; Kalpakçılar Caddesi 103, Grand Bazaar; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) When this family-run business started trading here in 1957, it was one of only 10 or so jewellery shops in the Grand Bazaar. The Güzelış have been making jewellery to order using every gold grade and every

MAKING A LIVING IN THE GRAND BAZAAR

İlhan Güzeliş is the owner and chief designer at Milano Güzeliş, a well-known jewellery store in the Grand Bazaar. The family-owned business was established by his great-grandfather in Mardin, in Turkey's southeast, and his father moved it to İstanbul in 1957. At that time there were fewer than 10 jewellery stores in the bazaar – these days 1500 of the bazaar's 4000 shops sell jewellery and the surrounding streets are littered with jewellery workshops. İlhan began learning his trade from his father when he was seven years old, but he fears that his own sons won't be following in his footsteps – it's hard to make a good living from individually designed and hand-crafted jewellery these days due to competition from glitzy megastores and malls, which sell relatively inexpensive mass-produced jewellery. He fears that the days of jewellers and their customers interacting over individual pieces are about to end.

One aspect of the bazaar that İlhan likes to discuss is its cultural and religious diversity. He points out that Muslims and Christians have always worked together harmoniously here, and that most of the diamonds the jewellers use are supplied by Jewish diamond traders. İlhan himself is a member of the Assyrian Orthodox Church – in İstanbul, half of the church's 15,000 members are involved in the jewellery business. Like many of the bazaar's shopkeepers he speaks a number of languages (in his case Turkish, English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic), but he and around 50% of his fellow Assyrian Christians can also speak Aramaic, one of the world's oldest languages.

İlhan will stay on in the bazaar for as long as he can keep on making a good livelihood and paying his rent. This is calculated separately for each store according to how much space the store occupies and where it is – all of the stores on Kalpakçılar Caddesi, where Milano Güzeliş is located, pay hefty rents because their street is perhaps the busiest in the bazaar. The rent is paid in gold (which seems particularly appropriate for jeweller tenants!), and can cost anywhere between half a kilogram to eight kilograms of the precious metal per year.

conceivable gem ever since, and have built a trusted reputation in the process. See also boxed text (above).

Artrium (Map pp94-5; ☎ 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.

Carpets & Textiles

our pick Cocoon (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-638 6271; www.cocoontr.com; Küçük Aya Sofya Caddesi 13, Sultanahmet; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm) There are so many rug and textile shops in İstanbul that choosing individual shops to recommend is incredibly difficult. We had no problem whatsoever in singling this one out, though. Felt hats, antique costumes and textiles from Central Asia are artfully displayed in one store, while rugs from Persia, Central Asia, the Caucasus and Anatolia adorn the other. There's a third shop in the Arasta Bazaar and a small shop selling felt objects in the Grand Bazaar.

Mehmet Çetinkaya Gallery (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-517 6808; www.cetinkayagallery.com; Tavukhane Sokak 7; ☎ 9.30am-8.30pm) When rug experts throughout the country meet for their annual shindig, this is one of the places where they come to check

out the good stuff. There's a second shop in the Arasta Bazaar.

Yılmaz İpekçilik (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-638 4579; İshakpaşa Caddesi 36; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 3-9pm Sun) Hand-loomed textiles made in a family-run factory in Antakya are on sale in this out-of-the-way shop. Good-quality silk, cotton and linen items at reasonable prices make it worth the short trek.

Dhoku (Map p109; ☎ 0212-527 6841; Takkeçiler Sokak 58-60, Grand Bazaar; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) One of a new generation of rug stores in the Bazaar, Dhoku (meaning texture) designs and sells contemporary kilims featuring attractive modernist designs. The same people run EthniCon (www.ethnicon.com) opposite.

Muhlis Günbattı (Map pp92-3; ☎ 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. There's another store opposite the Four Seasons Hotel in Sultanahmet.

Şişko Osman (Fatty Osman; Map p109; ☎ 0212-528 3548; www.siskoosman.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 are certainly hard to beat.

Handicrafts & Ceramics

İstanbul Handicrafts Market (İstanbul Sanatlar Çarşısı; Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-517 6782; Kabasakal Caddesi, Sultanahmet; 🕒 9am-6.30pm) Set in the small rooms surrounding the quiet, leafy courtyard of the 18th-century Cedit Mehmed Efendi Medresesi, this handicrafts centre is unusual in that local artisans work here and don't mind visitors watching them. It's a hassle-free place to purchase calligraphy, embroidery, glassware, miniature paintings, ceramics and costumed dolls.

İznik Classics & Tiles (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-517 1705; Arasta Bazaar 67 & 73, Sultanahmet; 🕒 9am-8pm) İznik Classics is one of the best places in town to source hand-painted collector-item ceramics made with real quartz and using metal oxides for pigments. Admire the range in the two shops and gallery in the Arasta Bazaar, in its Grand Bazaar store or in the newish outlet at 17 Utangaç Sokak.

Nakkaş (Map pp92-3; ☎ 0212-458 4702; Mimar Mehmet Ağa Caddesi 39; 🕒 9am-7pm) As well as pricey rugs and jewellery, Nakkaş stocks an extensive range of ceramics made by the well-regarded İznik Foundation. One of the reasons the place is so beloved of tour groups is the beautifully restored Byzantine cistern that's in the basement – make sure you have a peek.

Ak Gümuş (Map p109; ☎ 0212-526 0987; Gani Çelebi Sokak 8, Grand Bazaar; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Specialising in Central Asian tribal arts, this delightful store stocks an array of felt toys and hats, as well as jewellery and other objects made using coins and beads.

Delî Kızın Yeri (Map p109; ☎ 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. With a cute line of handmade Turkish teddies, dolls and puppets on offer, this is a great place to pick up gifts for the little ones in your life.

Güven Ticaret (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-526 0307; Kutucular Caddesi 26, Rüstempaşa; 🕒 6am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-6pm Sun) Cheap hamam bowls, cooking pans and coffee pots are sold at this simple shop at the end of Hasırıcılar Caddesi near the Spice Bazaar. You'll pay approximately a quarter of the price of their Grand Bazaar equivalents.

SİR (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-293 3661; www.sircini.com; Serdar Ekrem Sokak 66, Galata; 🕒 11am-7pm Mon-Sat) Ceramics produced in İstanbul can be prohibitively pricey, but the attractive hand-painted plates, platters, bowls and tiles sold at this small atelier are exceptions to the rule.

Homewares & Clothing

Abdulla Natural Products (Map p109; ☎ 0212-522 9078; Halıcılar Caddesi 62, Grand Bazaar; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Be sure to keep your luggage allowance in mind when entering this stylish shop. It sells handmade woollen throws from eastern Turkey, top-quality cotton bed and bath linen, and beautifully packaged olive-oil soap.

Azad Tekstil (Map p109; ☎ 0212-512 4202; Yağlıkçılar Caddesi 16, Grand Bazaar; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) If you're after well-priced cotton bedspreads, tablecloths or *peştemals* (cloth wraps used in bathrooms), this place is definitely worth checking out.

Derviş (Map p109; ☎ 0212-514 4525; www.dervis.com; Keseciler Caddesi 33-35, Grand Bazaar; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Gorgeous raw cotton and silk *peştemals* share shelf space here with traditional Turkish dowry vests and engagement dresses. If these don't take your fancy, the pure olive-oil soaps and old hamam bowls are sure to step into the breach. There's another store at Halıcılar Caddesi 51.

Vakko İndirim (Map pp90-1; ☎ 0212-522 8941; Yenicamii Caddesi 1/13, Eminönü; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) This remainder outlet of İstanbul's most glamorous department store should be on the itinerary of all bargain hunters. Top-quality men's and women's clothing is sold here for a fraction of its original price.

ANTIQUES, ANYONE?

Those seeking out authentic Ottoman souvenirs should visit the **Horhor Antikacılar Çarşısı** (Horhor Antique Market, Horhor Bitpazarı; Map pp86-7; 🕒 vary according to shop), where the city's serious collectors congregate. This decrepit building in Aksaray is home to five floors of shops selling antiques, curios and bric-a-brac of every possible description, quality and condition. To get here, catch the tram to Aksaray, walk up Horhor Caddesi, and turn right into Kırma Tulumba Sokak; the market is on the right-hand side of the street.

TURKISH DELIGHT

Ali Muhiddin Hacı Bekir was the most famous of all Ottoman confectioners. He came to İstanbul from the mountain town of Kastamonu in 1777 and opened a shop in the old city where he concocted delicious boiled sweets and the translucent jellied jewels known to Turks as *lokum* and to the rest of the world as Turkish Delight. His products became so famous throughout the city that his sweetshop empire grew, and his name became inextricably linked in the minds of İstanbullular with authentic and delicious *lokum*. Today, locals still buy their *lokum* from branches of the business he began over two centuries ago.

The flagship store of **Ali Muhiddin Hacı Bekir** (www.hacibekir.com.tr/eng) is located at Hamidiye Caddesi 83, Eminönü (Map pp90–1), near the Spice Bazaar. There are also stores on İstiklal Caddesi (Map pp94–5) and in the produce market at Kadıköy.

As well as enjoying *sade* (plain) *lokum*, you can buy it made with *cevizli* (walnut) or *şam fıstıklı* (pistachio), or flavoured with *portakallı* (orange), *bademli* (almond) or *roze* (rose water). Ask for a *çeşitli* (assortment) to sample the various types.

Gönül Paksoy (Map pp86–7; ☎ 0212-261 9081; Atiye Sokak 6/A & 1/3, Teşvikiye; 🕒 10am–7pm Mon–Sat) Paksoy creates and sells pieces that transcend fashion and step into art. These two shops showcase her distinctive clothing, which is made using naturally dyed fabrics and is often decorated with vintage beads.

Berrin Akyüz (Map pp94–5; ☎ 0212-251 4125; www.berrinakyuz.com; Havyar Sokak 26, Cihangir; 🕒 10.30am–7pm Mon–Sat) Local lasses love the reworked vintage clothing on offer at this Cihangir boutique, and no wonder. It's well priced and extremely stylish.

Mariposa (Map pp94–5; ☎ 0212-249 0483; Şimşirci Sokak 11a, Cihangir; 🕒 10am–8.30pm Mon–Fri, 11am–8.30pm Sat & Sun) The Mariposa atelier turns out a particularly fetching line in floral frocks. Fashionistas will adore the fact that as well as selling ready-to-wear, it also makes to order, and designs and tailors unique ensembles. As well as the dresses, coats and jackets on the racks, it sells pretty bedspreads and pillowslips.

Leather

Koç Deri (Map p109; ☎ 0212-527 5553; Kürkçüler Çarşısı 22–46, Grand Bazaar; 🕒 9am–7pm Mon–Sat) 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 p109; ☎ 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 is the place for you. Its copies of the work of the big-gun designers are good quality and a lot more affordable.

Derimod (Map pp86–7; ☎ 0212-247 7481; Vali Konağı Caddesi 103–116, Nişantaşı; 🕒 10am–7pm Mon–Sat) If

you're looking for top-quality leather goods, make your way to this branch of Derimod. It sells clothes for both men and women, as well as a large range of shoes and bags.

Music

A good range of Turkish musical instruments can be found in the shops along Galipdede Caddesi (Map pp94–5), which runs between Tünel Sq and the Galata Tower.

Lale Plak (Map pp94–5; ☎ 0212-293 7739; Galipdede Caddesi 1, Tünel; 🕒 9am–7pm Mon–Sat) This long-standing magnet for music aficionados is crammed with CDs in every genre, including jazz, Western and Turkish classical, Turkish folk and electronica.

Mephisto (Map pp94–5; ☎ 0212-249 0687; İstiklal Caddesi 197, Beyoğlu; 🕒 9am–midnight) This is the spot to pick up Turkish pop, rap and hip hop.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

İstanbul is the country's foremost transport hub.

Air

İstanbul's main international airport is **Atatürk International Airport** (IST; Atatürk Hava Limanı; ☎ 0212-465 5555; www.ataturkairport.com), 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 hall and a 24-hour supermarket on the walkway to the metro. There's also a **tourist information desk** (🕒 daily) that supplies a very limited range of maps and advice.

The **left-luggage service** (per suitcase per 24hr TL12-15; ☎ 24hr) is to your right 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 Atatürk International Airport is that travellers must pay to use a baggage trolley. You can pay in Turkish liras (TL1), euros (€1) or US dollars (US\$1); fortunately, attendants give change. You get the money back when you return the trolley.

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. There's a bank, minimarket and PTT here and use of trolleys is free of charge.

Many 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 p676. For information on flights from İstanbul to other Turkish cities, see p684.

Boat

KARAKÖY

Cruise ships arrive at the **Karaköy International Maritime Passenger Terminal** (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-249 5776) just near the Galata Bridge.

YENİKAPI

Yenikapı (Map pp90-1) is the dock for the **İDO** (İstanbul Deniz Otobüsleri; www.ido.com.tr) fast ferries across the Sea of Marmara to Yalova and Bandırma (from where you can catch a train to İzmir). These carry both passengers and cars. For more details on services to Yalova see p283 and for Bandırma, see p197.

Bus

BUS STATIONS

The **International İstanbul Bus Station** (Uluslararası İstanbul Otogarı; Map pp86-7; ☎ 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. There's an ATM here, a few cafés and unspeakably filthy toilets.

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 costing only TL2.60 (cheaper if you use Akbil). If you're coming from Taksim or Beyoğlu, bus 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 (TL1.40). 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 TL22 (20 minutes); from Taksim Sq around TL30 (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 p677 to p682.

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 pp86-7; ☎ 0216-333 3763), south of Üsküdar and north of Haydarpaşa Train Station. If you're arriving in İstanbul 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/Eminönü (ferry from 7am, then every half-hour until 9.30pm daily; TL1.40). 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).

INTERNATIONAL AIRLINE OFFICES

Most of the offices below are open from Monday to Friday between 9am and 5.30pm.

Aeroflot (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-296 6725; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 26b, Elmadağ)

Air France Taksim (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-310 1919; 14th fl, Emirhan Caddesi 145, Dikilitaş); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 5491)

Azerbaijan Airlines Taksim (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-296 3733; 4th fl, Cumhuriyet Caddesi 163, Elmadağ); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 212-465 3000)

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

Corendon Airlines (☎ 0216-585 5954; Sabiha Gökçen Airport)

Emirates Airlines Şişli (☎ 0212-315 4545; Şişli Plaza, 19 Mayıs Caddesi 57, 8th fl, A Blok); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-663 0708)

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

Iran Air (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-225 0255-7; Vali Konağı Caddesi 17, Harbiye)

JAL (Japan Airlines) (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-233 0840; 2nd fl, Cumhuriyet Caddesi 107, Elmadağ)

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

Lufthansa (☎ 0212-315 3400; Büyükdere Caddesi 122, 5th fl, Özsezen Is Merkezi C Block, Zincirlikuyu)

Olympic Airways Elmadağ (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-296 7575; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 171a); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 3388)

Onur Air (☎ 0212-663 2300; Çatal Sokak 3, Florya)

Pegasus Airlines Call Centre (☎ 0212-444 0737); Sabiha Gökçen Airport (☎ 216-588 0160)

Singapore Airlines Yeşilköy (☎ 0212-463 1800; GSA Turizm ve Havaçılık Ltd, EGS Business Park Plaza, 8th fl, 278, Block B2); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 3473)

Swiss International Air Lines (☎ 0212-354 9919; Büyükdere Caddesi 122, 5th fl, Özsezen Is Merkezi C Block, Zincirlikuyu)

Turkish Airlines Taksim (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-252 1106; Cumhuriyet Caddesi 7, Elmadağ); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 212-463 6363) The Elmadağ office is also open on weekends.

BUS COMPANIES

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

Kamil Koç Otogar (☎ 444 0562 country-wide; www.kamilkoc.com.tr in Turkish; ticket office No 144-6); Beyoğlu ticket office (Map pp94-5; ☎ 0212-252 7223; İnönü Caddesi 31)

Ulusoy Otogar (☎ 444 1888 country-wide; www.ulusoy.com.tr; ticket office No 128); Beyoğlu ticket office (Map pp94-5; ☎ 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 pp94-5; ☎ 0212-251 7474; İnönü Caddesi 19b)

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 Sabiha Gökçen International Airport. This will be your main route for getting to and from İstanbul, 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 İstanbul; park it for the duration of your stay (p163). 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 İstanbul. This will mean lugging your baggage by taxi or public transport to the airport, but it won't mean navigating İstanbul'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.

Reliable car rental agencies:

Avis Taksim (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-297 9610; www.avis.com.tr; Abdülhak Hamit Caddesi 72a; ☎ 9am-7pm); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 3455-6; ☎ 24hr); Sabiha Gökçen International Airport (☎ 0216-585 5154; ☎ 7am-11pm)

Hertz Taksim (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-225 6404; www.hertz.com.tr, in Turkish; Yedikuyular Caddesi 4); Atatürk International Airport (☎ 0212-465 5999; ☎ 24hr); Sabiha Gökçen International Airport (☎ 0216-588 0141; ☎ 9am-7pm)

SERVICES FROM İSTANBUL'S OTOGAR

Destination	Fare (TL)	Duration (hr)	Distance (km)
Alanya	50	16	860
Ankara	25-44	6	450
Antakya	40	18	1115
Antalya	40-45	12½	740
Bodrum	50	12½	860
Bursa	17	4	230
Çanakkale	30-35	6	340
Denizli (for Pamukkale)	40	12	665
Edirne	17-20	2½	235
Fethiye	50	12	820
Göreme	40	11	725
İzmir	30-49	8	575
Kaş	60	12	1090
Konya	40	10	660
Kuşadası	45	9	555
Marmaris	50	12½	805
Trabzon	60	24	970

National Taksim (☎ 0212-254 7719; www.nationalcar.com; Şehit Muhtar Mahallesi, Aydede Sokak 1/2; ☎ 8.30am-7pm); 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 pp92-3; ☎ 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 (p163) is finished, trains will terminate at Yenikapı.

Trains from the Asian side of Turkey and from countries east and south currently terminate at **Haydarpaşa Train Station** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 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, numerous snack shops, 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, Haydarpaşa Train Station is scheduled to close and services will move to a new station currently being built in Söğütlüçeşme, near Üsküdar.

Major domestic train services departing from Haydarpaşa include:

4 Eylül Mavi (Malatya via Ankara, Kayseri & Sivas)

Doğu Ekspresi (Kars via Ankara, Kayseri, Sivas, Erzurum)

Güney Ekspresi (Kurtalan via Ankara, Kayseri, Sivas, Malatya & Diyarbakır)

İç Anadolu Mavi (Adana via Konya)

Meram Ekspresi (Konya)

Pamukkale Ekspresi (Denizli via Eşirdir)

Toros Ekspresi (Gaziantep via Konya & Adana)

Vangölü Ekspresi (Tatvan via Ankara, Kayseri & Malatya)

There are six services between İstanbul and Ankara: the Baskent, Cumhuriyet, Fatih, Boğaziçi, Anadolu and Ankara Expresses. Fares on these range from TL8.75 to TL71.

GETTING AROUND

Moving some 16 million people around İstanbul is a challenge (understatement of the year), but in the last few years the government has begun to implement the ambitious Marmaray project (see p163), which aims to ease the city's horrendous traffic problems. Thankfully most of the major sights you're likely to visit on a short visit to the city are within walking distance or a short tram or bus ride away.

To/From the Airport

ATATÜRK INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Getting from the airport to Sultanahmet by public transport is cheap and easy. There

INTERNATIONAL TRAIN SERVICES TO/FROM İSTANBUL

For timetable and fare updates, and to check details of when these services depart European destinations on their return trips, go to www.tcdd.gov.tr.

From Sirkeci Train Station

All the following services are express trains. The fares quoted are for a seat (cheapest) to a single couchette (most expensive). All seats on the Dostlu/Filia Ekspres are couchettes, so we have listed 1st- and 2nd-class fares.

Destination	Train	Fare (TL)	Frequency	Departs	Arrives	Duration (hr)
Belgrade, Serbia	Bosfor/Balkan Ekspresi	92.40-252.60	daily	10pm	8.12pm	22
Bucharest, Romania	Bosfor Ekspresi	81.10-283.50	daily	10pm	5.09pm	19
Thessaloniki, Greece	Dostlu/Filia Ekspresi	101.30-178.20	daily	8.30am & 9pm	10.02pm & 8.30am	11½
Sofia, Bulgaria	Bosfor Ekspresi	37.80-98.30	daily	10pm	12.40pm	15

From Haydarpaşa Train Station

The fares quoted are for a 1st-class couchette (the only option available).

Destination	Train	Fare (TL)	Frequency	Departs	Arrives	Duration (hr)
Aleppo, Syria	Toros Ekspresi	101.20	Sun	8.55am	3pm	30 (via Adana, Konya, Eskişehir)
Tabriz, Iran	Trans-Asya Ekspresi	111.20	Wed	10.55pm	6.35pm	66½ (via Ankara, Kayseri, Van)

are a couple of options, but the most convenient and quickest is to take the Light Rail Transport (LRT) service from the airport six stops to Zeytinburnu (TL1.40), from where you connect with the tram (TL1.40) 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 5.40am until 1.40am.

Hostels and some of the smaller hotels in Sultanahmet can book minibus transport from the hostel to the airport for around TL10 per person. Unfortunately, this option only works if you’re going *from* town to the airport and not the other way around, and there are only six or so services per day. 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 finally heading out to the airport (30 to 45 minutes).

If you are staying near Taksim Sq, the **Havaş airport bus** (Map pp86-7; ☎ 0212-244 0487; www.havas.com.tr; one way TL9 6am-midnight, TL11.25 midnight-6am)

is the easiest option. Buses leave the airport every 15 to 30 minutes from 4am until 1am; from Taksim Sq, buses depart every 15 to 30 minutes from 4am to 1am.

Alternatively, you could take the LRT all the way to Aksaray (TL1.40), and then catch a bus from the nearby Pertevniyal V Sultan stop to Taksim Sq. Loads of buses from here go to Taksim – look for any number preceded by a ‘T’.

A taxi between the Atatürk International Airport and Sultanahmet or Taksim Sq should cost around TL35, 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** is a

İETT

İstanbul Elektrik Tramvay ve Tünel (İETT) is responsible for running the public bus, tram, LRT and metro systems in the city. Its excellent website (www.iETT.gov.tr) has useful timetable and route information in Turkish and English.

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.

The **Havaş airport bus** (☎ 0212-444 0487; www.havas.com.tr; one way TL10) travels between the airport and Taksim Sq. These depart the airport 25 minutes after planes land. They leave the Havaş office at Taksim every hour or so between 4am and 1am.

İETT buses travel between the airport and the Levent 4 metro station (TL1.40), where you can connect with the metro to Taksim Sq (TL1.40), and then the funicular (TL1.40) and tram (TL1.40) to Sultanahmet. These depart between 5am to 7.50pm Monday to Saturday and 2am to 1am Sunday.

There is also an İETT bus service to Kadıköy (TL1.40), from where you can catch a ferry to Eminönü (TL1.40) and then a tram (TL1.40) up to Sultanahmet. These depart between 6am and 10.30pm weekdays, 6.30am to 10.30pm Saturday and 7am to 9.30pm Sunday.

Most hotels and hostels in Sultanahmet can book minibus transport from your accommodation to Sabiha Gökçen for around TL30 per head.

A taxi from Sabiha Gökçen International Airport and Sultanahmet costs at least TL80; to Taksim it will be at least TL60.

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 TL1.40 and

it's possible to use Akbil (see below) on all routes.

The main ferry docks are at the mouth of the Golden Horn (Eminönü, Sirkeci and Karaköy) and at Beşiktaş, a few kilometres northeast of the Galata Bridge, near Dolmabahçe Palace. There are also busy docks at Kadıköy and Üsküdar on the Asian (Anatolian) side. Ferries travel many routes around the city, but the routes commonly used by travellers include: **Beşiktaş–Üsküdar** (every 20 to 30 minutes from 6.45am to 9pm)

Beşiktaş–Kadıköy (every 30 minutes from 7.15am to 9.15pm)Eminönü–Anadolu Kavağı (Boğaziçi Özel Gezi; Bosphorus Excursions Ferry; between one and three services per day)

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

Eminönü–Kadıköy (approximately every 15 to 20 minutes from 7.30am to 8.35pm)

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

Kabataş–Kadıköy–Kınalıada–Burgazada–Heybeliada–Büyükkada (Princes' Islands ferry; at least eight ferries per day)

Karaköy–Kadıköy–Haydarpaşa (approximately every 20 minutes from 6.10am–11pm)

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

Üsküdar–Karaköy–Eminönü–Kasımpaşa–Fener–Balat–Hasköy–Ayvansaray–Sütlüce–Eyüp (approximately every hour, from 7.30am to 7.50pm)

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

AKBİL

An Akbil is a computerised debit fare tag that will save you time and money when hopping on and off trams, trains, the LRT, ferries and buses all around the city. Akbil tags are available at the Akbil Gişesi booths at the Sultanahmet tram stop or the Sirkeci, Eminönü, Aksaray or Taksim Sq bus stands for a TL6 deposit. Unfortunately, you cannot purchase them at either of İstanbul's airports. When you have your tag, you can charge it unlimited times with TL5, TL10, TL20 or TL50 at any Akbil booth or at machines at the Tünel or metro stations (using TL50 notes in the machines can be problematic, so we suggest only doing this at the manned booths). You can also purchase daily (*günlük*), weekly (*haftalık*), 15-day (*15 günlük*) and monthly (*aylık*) tags. Press the tag or card's metal button into the fare machine on a bus, ferry, LRT, train, metro, 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 tag.

THREE CHEERS FOR MARMARAY

Marmaray (www.tcdd.gov.tr/tcdding/marmaray_ing.htm) is an ambitious public transport project aimed to relieve İstanbul's woeful traffic congestion. Its name comes from combining the name of the Sea of Marmara, which lies just south of the project site, with *ray*, the Turkish word for rail. Plans show the Sirkeci–Halkalı rail line, which presently follows the coast to Yeşilköy near the airport, going underground at Yedikule and travelling to underground stations at Yenikapı and Sirkeci. From Sirkeci it will travel some 5km in a new tunnel being built under the Bosphorus to another underground station on the Asian side at Üsküdar. From there it will come to ground level at Söğütlüçeşme, some 2km east of Kadıköy, where it will connect with the Gebze Anatolian rail line.

The project was slated to be completed by 2010, but the deadline has been extended to 2012 and may take even longer. 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. The works, which are still under way, have been documented in the excellent 'Light of Day' exhibition on show at the İstanbul Archaeological Museums (p108).

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.

Most top-end hotels offer undercover parking for guests, and many midrange options have a streetside park or two that is nominally theirs to use. Organise this with the hotel ahead of your arrival.

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; there's an hourly fee to pay in these. There is also roadside parking, free of charge. 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 parking option. Negotiate a rate for the duration of your stay. Expect to pay TL10 to TL15 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 TL59 for four days, or TL96 per week. See www.ataturkairport.com for more information.

Dolmuş

İstanbul dolmuş are privately run minibuses working defined routes. As a short-term visitor to the city, you won't have much, if any, cause to use them.

Public Transport

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 *otobus* (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 (TL1.40) 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.

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 three-minute 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 TL1.40.

A new 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. The three-minute service runs around every three minutes and cost TL1.40.

LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT (LRT)

An LRT service connects Aksaray with the airport, stopping at 15 stations including the otogar along the way. Services depart every 10 minutes or so from 5.40am until 1.40am and cost TL1.40, no matter how many stops you travel. There are plans to eventually 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 6.30am to 12.20am (TL1.40).

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. Though decrepit, the trains are reliable (nearly every half-hour) and cheap (TL1.40).

TRAM

An excellent tramway (*tramvay*) service runs from Zeytinburnu (where it connects with the airport LRT) to Sultanahmet and Eminönü, and then across the Galata Bridge to Karaköy (to connect with the funicular to Tünel) and Kabataş (to connect with the funicular to Taksim Sq). Trams run every five minutes or so from 6am to midnight. Tickets cost TL1.40.

A quaint antique tram rattles its way up and down İstiklal Caddesi in Beyoğlu every day, beginning its 15-minute journey just outside the Tünel station and travelling to Taksim Sq, stopping in front of the Galatasaray Lycée (p115) en route. Tickets aren't available on board – you must use an Akbil or purchase a ticket (TL1.40) from the Tünel station.

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.

Occasionally, 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 TL10; ignore taxi drivers who insist on a fixed rate as these are 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 TL5 note for payment, when they were really given TL20.

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 0.5TL.

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 Imrali 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.

You'll realise after landing that there are no cars on the islands, something that comes as a welcome relief after the traffic mayhem of the city. Except for the necessary police, fire and sanitation vehicles, transport is by bicycle, horse-drawn carriage and foot, as in centuries past.

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, five of them populated. The ferry stops at four of these; the fifth, Sedef, has only recently attracted a resident population. There are 15,000 permanent residents scattered across the five, but numbers swell to 100,000 during the summer months when İstanbullular – many of whom have holiday homes here – 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**. Frankly, neither island offers much reward for the trouble of getting off the ferry.

In contrast, the charming island of **Heybeliada** (Heybeli for short) has much to offer the visitor. It's home to the Turkish Naval Academy, which was founded in 1773 and is seen to the left of the ferry dock as you arrive. It also 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** (☎ 0216-351 8563). Perched above a picturesque line of poplar trees in a spot that has been occupied by a Greek monastery since Byzantine times, this building dates from 1894 and has an internationally renowned library. The monastery functioned as a Greek Orthodox school of theology where priests were trained until 1971, when it was closed on the government's orders. The Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarchate (p124) in Fener has applied for permission to reopen the school. You may be able to visit if you call ahead.

Heybeliada has a couple of hotels, including the Merit Halki Palace (p166), which is perched at the top of Rafah Şehitleri Caddesi and commands wonderful views over the water. The delightful walk up to this hotel passes an antique shop 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 the Atatürk statue. 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 (TL2 to TL3.50 per hour) or a *fatyon* (horse-drawn carriage) to take you on a tour of the island. A 25-minute tour (*küçük tur*) costs TL20, a one-hour tour (*büyük tur*) TL30. Some visitors choose to spend the day by the **pool** (weekdays/weekends TL50/60) at the Merit Halki 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** ('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 (p166) providing an unmistakable landmark.

The **ferry terminal** is a lovely building in the Ottoman kiosk style dating from 1899. Inside there's a pleasant café with an outdoor terrace. 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, then head along Çankaya Caddesi up the hill to the monastery; when you come to a fork in the road, veer right. The enjoyable walk, which takes at least one hour, takes you past a long progression of impressive wooden villas set in gardens. About a quarter of the way up on the left is the **Büyükada Kültür Evi**, a charming spot where you can enjoy a tea or coffee in a garden setting. The house itself dates from 1878 and was restored in 1998. After 40 minutes or so you will reach a reserve called 'Luna Park' by the locals. The monastery is a 25-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 (TL10). As you ascend you will see 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 right). 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 town, and shops on the market street can provide picnic supplies, although food is cheaper on the mainland.

Just off the clock tower square and opposite the Splendid Otel you'll find a *fayton* stand. Hire one for a long tour of town, the hills and shore (one hour, TL45) or a shorter tour of the town only (TL35). It costs TL16 to be taken to 'Luna Park'. A shop just near the *fayton* stand hires out bicycles for TL2.50 to TL3 per hour.

Sleeping & Eating

There's not really much of an argument for staying here overnight – it's much more sensible to spend a day here and then return to the city, where the sleeping and eating options are better and less expensive.

HEYBELIADA

Merit Halki Palace (☎ 0216-351 0025; www.halkipalacehotel.com; Rafah Şehitleri Caddesi 94; s/d Sun-Thu €65/85, s/d Fri & Sat €85/135; 🍷) This comfortable hotel is a popular weekend-break destination for İstanbullular. Its pool area is particularly impressive, and its restaurant serves meals and drinks on the poolside terrace.

Mavi Restaurant (☎ 0216-351 0128; Yalı Caddesi 29; mains TL12-20; 🍷 24hr) This fish restaurant on the main waterfront promenade is popular with locals and has loads of outdoor seating.

BÜYÜKADA

Splendid Otel (☎ 0216-382 6950; www.splendidhotel.net; Nisan Caddesi 23; s TL105, d TL150-175; 🍷) This 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 TL24 for the front rooms with small balconies and sea views (not available for singles).

Hotel Princess Büyükada (☎ 0216-382 1628; www.buyukadaprincess.com; İskele Meydanı 2; r Sun-Fri TL150-180, Sat TL230-260; 🍷 🍷) This recently refurbished hotel is right in the heart of things on the clock tower square. Rooms are large and pleasant enough. Sea-view rooms are worth the €10 extra.

Yüce-tepe Kır Gazinosu restaurant (Monastery of St George; mains Y77-8; 🍷 daily Apr-Oct, weekends only Nov-Mar) Simple but appetising food is served at the outdoor tables here.

Getting There & Away

At least nine daily ferries run to the islands every day between 6.50am and 7.40pm, departing from the Adalar İskelesi ferry dock at Kabataş, opposite the tram stop. The most useful departure times for day trippers are 8.30am, 9.20am, 10.10am and 11.35am on weekdays and 8.30am, 9am, 9.30am, 10am, 11am and noon on weekends, but timetables change, so check www.ido.com.tr beforehand. The ferry returns from Büyükada at times including 3.15pm, 4pm and 5.45pm on weekdays and 3.15pm, 4.30pm 5.05pm and 5.45pm on weekends, stopping at Heybeliada en route to Kabataş. The last ferry of the day leaves Büyükada at 10pm (9.45pm on weekends). The trip costs TL2.80 to the islands, and the same for each leg between the islands and for the return trip. The cheapest and easiest way to pay is to use your Akbil (see p162). 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 Kabataş and after 20 minutes 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 Büyükada.

Many day trippers stay on the ferry until Heybeliada, stop there for an hour or so and hop on a ferry to Büyükada, 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 Büyükada, but you save little time and the cost is much higher.

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