

Izmir: The Pearl of the Aegean

Izmir, a city that lies in the Aegean region of Turkey, has a history that goes back to 3000 B.C. Many civilizations passed the region and many legends are told about this beautiful city, including stories with the Amazon warriors as well as with Alexander the Great.



Every single civilization that passed by or settled here had a great interest in Izmir, not just for its strategic importance as a port on the Aegean but they were also struck by its beauty. That is also the reason for a Turkish nickname of Izmir called “The Pearl of The Aegean”.

Today Izmir attracts many local and foreign visitors. It is clearly not just because it has many archaeological sites in and around the city that can be visited in every season, but it is also for its natural beauties such as crystal clear waters of the Aegean and the beaches in its resorts like Cesme (Çeşme), Foca (Foça), Gumuldur (Gümüldür). Visitors also enjoy the local night life in the city or in Cesme and Kusadasi (Kuşadası), as well as the nice cafeterias and restaurants along the seaside where you can taste the fish or typical Aegean dishes mostly based on vegetables and olive oil while you are enjoying the sunset at the bay. What more, Izmir’s young, dynamic, and good looking residents are always ready to show you the Turkish hospitality. When you sum up all these factors the city of Izmir surely becomes an attractive holiday destination.

Izmir is the third largest city in Turkey with a population of around 4 million. It is one of the major ports in the whole Aegean, from which loads of agricultural products of Anatolia are exported, thus making the city economically important as well. In the province there is an oil refinery and many factories and agricultural fields in which they cultivate or produce figs, grapes and raisins, wine, olives and olive oil, tobacco, milk and dairy products, beer, cement, iron and steel, chemicals,

plastics and much more.



In Izmir and around the city there are many historical and archeological sites, and some of them are very important such as Smyrna, Ephesus, Pergamon, Teos, Erythrai, and the House of Virgin Mary. Meanwhile in the city tourists can visit numerous Roman, Byzantine or Ottoman sights like the Agora, Kadifekale Castle (ancient Pagos Mountain), Aqueducts, Hisar mosque, Kizlaragasi inn, old Jewish synagogues, old Elevator (Asansör), and the interesting Archaeological and Ethnography museum. There is also the old Kemeralti market where the visitors can buy many traditional and local items, souvenirs, or food.

A number of cultural events like operas, theater plays, art displays, and fairs are also quite attractive to the visitors. One of them is the Izmir International Fair which is organized at the Culture Park (Kültürpark) in the beginning of September every year which lures tens of thousands of visitors from all around the world.

For sports enthusiasts Izmir is one of the best destinations especially for sailing since there are several marinas in Cesme, Alacati (Alaçatı), Sigacik (Sığacık), Kusadasi. Cesme and Alacati are the ideal locations for wind surfing and kite boarding and each year local and international championships are organized here. Scuba diving, hiking and trekking are also amongst the popular sports in the region. Izmir also hosted the Universiade Summer Games in 2005, which is an analogy of the Olympic Games organized for college students.



For leisure tourists or businessmen Izmir offers many accommodation options - ranging from international luxury hotels to local small hotels. Fine local restaurants offer many varieties of fish, vegetable dishes, meat dishes, appetizers known as meze's, salads, and Turkish desserts. Most of the cafeterias and restaurants at Kordon promenade in Alsancak district or the ones at Karsiyaka (Karşıyaka) district offer great views of the bay, especially at sunset.

According to the locals this is one of the "Must Do's" when you are in Izmir: sip your drink in one of the bars or cafeterias at Kordon looking at the sunset. Alternatively you can also take a ferry ride between Alsancak and Karsiyaka districts to enjoy the amazing sunset of the city from the sea. In the evening, a walk on Kibris Şehitleri (Kıbrıs Şehitleri) street in Alsancak district famed for local bars will be a joy for the young-hearted.

By Burak Sansal

Burak Sansal is a professional National Tour Guide, working with Turkey's most prestigious travel agencies. Traveling extensively worldwide, he has a personal knowledge of touring and travel facilities not only in Turkey but also in USA, Western and Eastern Europe, Russia China, Korea, Japan, but also Lebanon, Kenya, and the Caribbean.

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