

# Istanbul: The Love of Continents

“If the world was a single state, Istanbul would be the capital.” Napoleon

Harmonizing all colors and diversities of Turkey, Istanbul is considered among the top 10 destinations of the world.



Istanbul has been inspiring many artists with its dynamic life, modern avenues touched by history; museums mingled with art; palaces, kiosks and monumental buildings portraying unique examples of various architectural styles; mosques, churches and synagogues which have claimed their eternal brotherhood; and locations offering tastes of the rich Turkish cuisine blended with Ottoman flavors.

Istanbul, whose history spans to more than 2,500 years, is situated on a peninsula surrounded by the Marmara Sea, the Bosphorus, and the Golden Horn.

Istanbul, having hosted various civilizations, cultures and beliefs served as the capital for the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. Throughout more than 1600 years, over 120 Emperors and Sultans reigned in Istanbul, thus making it the only city in the world with such distinction.

The historical area of Istanbul is formed by four main areas: the Archaeological Park (Sultanahmet

Square and its surrounding area), the Suleymaniye Mosque, the Zeyrek Mosque (the Church of Christ Pantokrator) and its surrounding Conservation Area, and the City Walls of Istanbul.

Istanbul is a holy city, where mosques, churches and synagogues stand side by side, and even declare their fraternity. Istanbul is also renowned for its palaces, mansions and monumental buildings – each of them is a unique example of architectural styles that were inherited from the Ottomans. Dolmabahce Palace; Tophane Mosque; Galata Tower (Christea Turris) built by the Genoese; Sultanahmet Mosque; Ayasofya (Hagia Sophia) – one of the monumental buildings of Christianity with its unique mosaics; Topkapi Palace – the administrative centre of the Ottoman Empire; Suleymaniye Mosque, rising high above the Golden Horn; the masterpiece of imperial architect Mimar Sinan, the historical Kapali Carsi (the Grand Bazaar); Yerebatan Sarnici (the Basilica Cistern); the music dancing at the domes of Aya Irini (Hagia Eirene), make Istanbul the capital of history and culture.



Ayasofya was built on one of the most important historical sites in Istanbul, with the present buildings being completed in 532–537 AD. Built as a cathedral, it served as the most important sanctum of Christianity for approximately 1000 years. Following the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans, it was converted into a mosque. Currently the building is used as a museum.

The most important characteristic of the Sultanahmet Mosque, across Hagia Sofia, is that it is the only mosque constructed with 6 minarets. The mosque itself, having more than 36 windows, is rendered in more than 20,000 İznik tiles.

Topkapi Palace served as the administrative centre of the Ottoman Empire, and today it houses the globally famed Kasikci (Spoonmaker's) Diamond. The Palace, at present, represents a museum exhibiting unique artifacts from the glorious history of the Ottoman Empire.

Yerebatan Sarnici (the Basilica Cistern), built in 527–567 to provide water to the settlement nearby, is situated within the Archaeological Park. The head of Medusa, who according to the Greek mythology turned to stone anyone who dared to gaze directly at her, is carved at the column-base and can be seen in the shallow waters of the cistern, and it is the most visited attraction in the Park.



The historical Maiden's Tower or Leander's Tower is one of the symbols of Istanbul, and it represents an embodiment of the mystery of water, love and myth. Being one of the most romantic and mysterious places in Istanbul, a pretty, small tower is built on the rocks at the entrance of the Bosphorus. The Tower still holds its ancient facade and currently serves as a restaurant and sightseeing platform for visitors.

Abundance of poems, countless sonnets and songs have been written for Istanbul, for its fascinating beauty, for its historical and cultural riches, that have all been a source of inspiration for generations of artists. So Istanbul is waiting for those who would like to witness the great love of continents.

The ideal time to visit Istanbul this year would be April, as by April 26th 2011 a heart of shopping is to beat in the unique city of Istanbul, the only city which connects two continents and is currently the capital of shopping. With "Istanbul Shopping Fest" Istanbul is the first city that springs to mind when it comes to

shopping, since more than 90 shopping malls are offering hundreds of local and foreign brands in various streets, stirring with life, such as Taksim, Nişantaşı, Şişli, Bakırköy, Fatih, Bahariye and Bağdat Avenue and traditional shopping spots like the Grand Bazaar and the Spice Bazaar.

During the Istanbul Shopping Fest there will be sales on offer up to 30% for more than 300 local and foreign brands, as well as tax-free shopping for shoppers from abroad. Also during the festival the Newroz, Easter and the Passover will be celebrated, which will continue the tradition of people of various civilizations, cultures, religions, languages and races living together in peace and harmony for centuries.

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