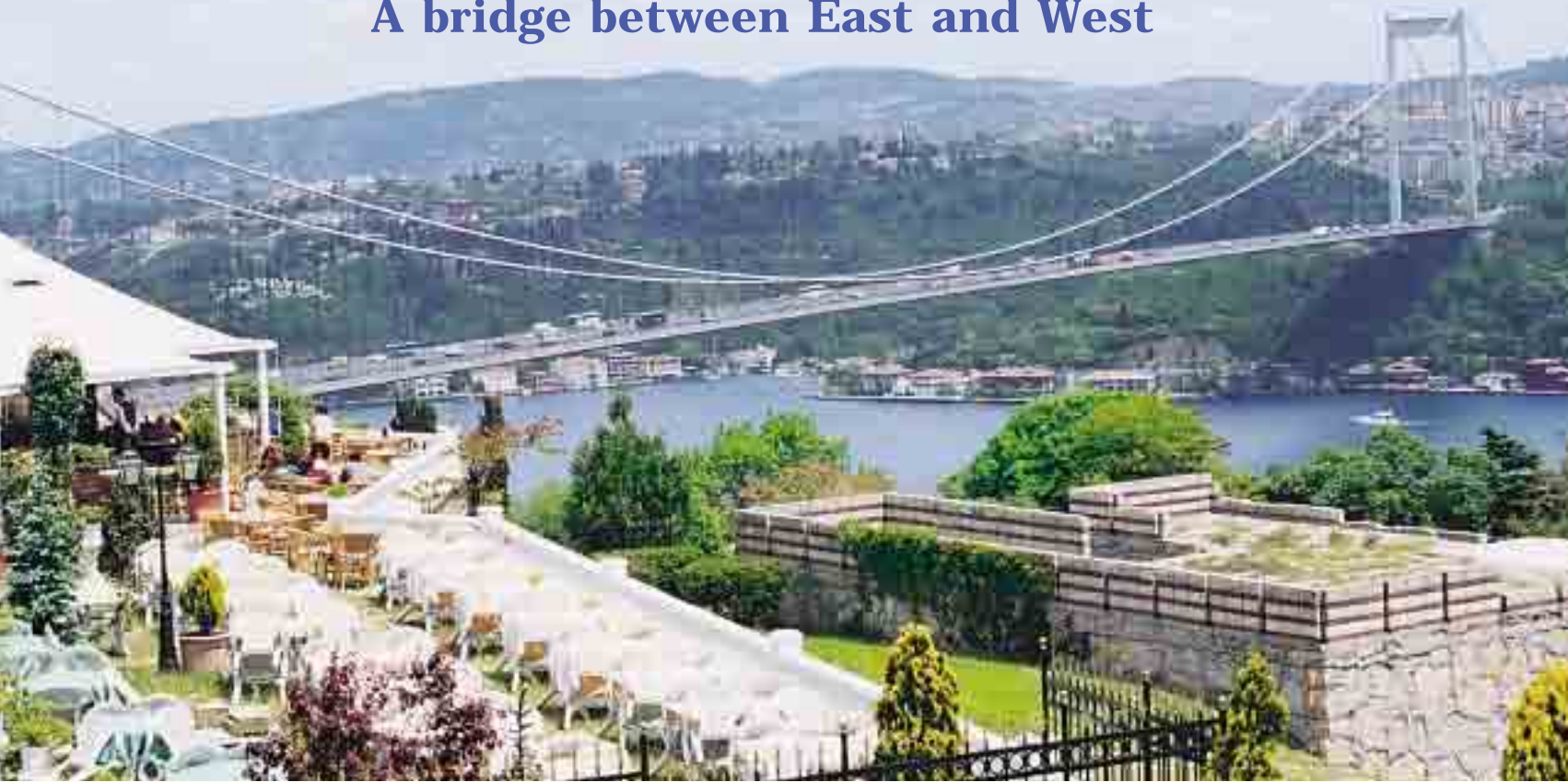


Istanbul

The Imperial Capital

A bridge between East and West



جسر محمد الفاتح يربط أوروبا بآسيا.

Al-Fatih Bridge connecting Europe to Asia.

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Many poets have eulogized the beauty of Istanbul whilst crossing the Bosphorus Straits or having settled there. Its very uniqueness makes Istanbul one of the most wonderful cities in the world and a destination no tourist should ignore, with its rich civilization, culture and architecture that has witnessed so many historical periods throughout its history.

Istanbul has been a capital of three empires: Rome, Byzantium and Ottoman. A centre of power and authority, it was also a favourite place for craftsmen, architects and artists. Little wonder, therefore, that the city still houses some of the grandest treasures of these empires, giving us today a legacy that is a combination of east and west, perhaps nowhere more symbolized than in the innovative Ottomanesque architecture of Sinan Pasha which charac-

terizes the city's mosques, palaces, schools and public fountains, all collectively relating to us the story of human innovation.

The unique features of Istanbul are not only found in its rich architectural heritage but extends to other areas too, not least in the variety of shopping that can be done in both the old bazaars and the modern markets. It is also a city of museums, whose contents narrate the tale of successive generations of its inhabitants. And it is a city of mosques, each one an example of architectural innovation.

Istanbul stands upon seven hills that stretch across two continents - Asia and Europe - separated by the Bosphorus Straits from the coasts of which visitors can marvel at the gorgeous villas, indicating the history of its settlement. ➔



منظر للجامع الجديد في منطقة أمينونو
A view of the New Mosque in Aminono

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Historical Profile

Istanbul is one of the oldest cities in the world. The excavations of 1952 and 1954 in Kadikoy found out that settlement in the area goes back four thousand years BC. Although there are different versions as to how the city was born, the most common one is that a man named Bezans, accompanied by a group of wanderers searching for a place to settle, went to the priest of Delfoy for advice. The latter suggested they settle down "opposite the land of the blind". The party set out for what is today Saray Borno, being fascinated by the area opposite Kadikoy, which has been a centre of settlement ever since. They were surprised to discover there that the people of this area did not notice the magnificent hill opposite them, hence the priest's

reference to the blind. Taking this as a sign, the wanderers settled there and called the city Byzantine, after their leader, Bezans.

Islamic campaigns succeeded in conquering the city, which by that time had been renamed Constantinople after the Christian Byzantine emperor, Constantine. The Muslim motto was: "*Let us conquer Constantine, grace be upon its prince, grace be upon its army*". The later campaign of the caliph Yezid, in which the notable Abu Ayyub al-Ansari participated, faced severe obstacles because of the city's fortified nature and strong walls. But under the Ottoman sultan, Muhammad Fatih, the city was eventually surrounded and besieged by land and sea for two months, overtaking it on 29 May 1453/20 Jamadi 1, 857AH.

Palaces, Museums and Architecture

On a hill opposite the entrance to the Bosphorus Straits, from the side of the Sea of Marmara, is the Palace of Topkapi with its magnificent buildings. This was the seat of Ottoman power between the period of the 15th and 19th centuries. Today, it is one of the most important museums in the world, containing priceless historical treasures.

Six hundred metres further along the European side of the Straits is Dolmapahce Palace which Sultan Abdul Majeed I built in the mid-19th Century. This houses precious jewels, handicrafts, costume and clothing, ceramic artefacts and other treasures. Dolmapashe Mosque stands opposite the palace, characterized by the influence of Western styles on Ottoman architecture.

The Beylerbeyi Palace, with its magnificent ➤

The old wall of the city extends for seven kilometres from the Sea of Marmara to the Golden Horn. This focal historical site dates back to the 5th Century and the reign of Emperor Theodosius II.



مدخل جامع السلطان أحمد الذي يُطل على آيا صوفيا
Entrance Gate to the Mosque of Sultan Ahmed



أحد نماذج قطع السجاد المشهورة في المدينة
A Famous Istanbul Kilim

gardens built by Sultan Abdul Aziz in the 19th Century (this is situated on the Asian side of the Straits), was also the Sultan's summer resort. The Yildiz Palaces, completed by Sultan Abdul Hameed II at the end of the 19th Century, included the most luxurious buildings and beautiful gardens containing a variety of trees from all over the world. The Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture in Istanbul (IRCICA), a component of the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference) occupies three of the main buildings within this latter group of palaces, namely the palaces of Seer Koshki, Jeet, and Yaravan.

The Galata Tower, which was built in 1348 at a height of 62 metres, provides a magnificent panoramic view of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus Straits. It

also has a café for visitors.

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The castle of Rumeli Hisari was built by Sultan Muhammad Fatih in 1452 after he conquered the city, and remains an international example of military architecture. The castle was built with great efficiency in record time from (March to July 1452) and stands at 82 metres above sea level. It has three towers, each one of which is 27 metres high. The total area it occupies is 30,250 square metres.

The sultan built this castle in the vicinity of Anatoli Hisari, the castle constructed by ➤

أكشاك بيع الزهور
في ساحة تكسيم
Flower vendors in
Taksim Square



his grandfather, Yildrum Bayezid, on the other side of the Straits in order to impose strict surveillance of the waters and prevent any ships from passing through the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea and vice versa. His castle is today a main attraction for tourists who marvel at its architecture, design and structure, not to mention its particular geographical location overlooking the magnificent Bosphorus.

Any visitor to Istanbul must indulge in a sea voyage across the Bosphorus if only to experience the unique interlinking of Europe and Asia. Such a trip offers much more besides, including impressive natural beauty and a sneak at the traditional houses and residences on both sides of the Straits in addition to the many luxury hotels that have sprang up there. Among these is the historical Ciragan Hotel which was refurbished by Sultan Abdul Aziz in 1874 and extends 300 metres along the Straits.

The voyage also passes the region of Ortakoy which is always crowded with visitors and is full of arts fairs where artists meet on Sunday mornings to personally display their work. Then there is Tarabya, which is renowned for its beautiful white boats. This is also a meeting point for holidaymakers, especially during the summer, with numerous restaurants and coffee houses.

Istanbul also buzzes, of course, with cultural, artistic and entertainment activities throughout the year, making it a suitable destination all year round. Many international festivals take place here, such as the Annual International Festival for Culture and Arts which is held in June and July and includes arts shows, a variety of different fairs, opera shows, films, conferences and other cultural activities.

The Innovative Heritage of Historical Mosques

The main historical mosques in the city of Istanbul are:

The Mosque of Sultan Ahmed

An architectural work of art with its six minarets standing opposite Aya Sofia Museum. It was built during the period 1609-1616 and is known as the Blue Mosque because of its peculiarly beautiful blue and white aznik marble.

The Sulayman Mosque

This was built on the western hillside of the

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Golden Horn during the period 1550-1557 by the architect Sinan Pasha and is one of the most exquisite mosques in the city. The mosque is distinguished by its wide courtyard, four remarkable minarets and the white marble *minbar* and *mihrab*. The mosque also incorporates other buildings within its environs, including four madressahs, one of which specialized in medicine. The Sulayman Library opposite this mosque is one of the main libraries of Istanbul.

Al-Fatih Mosque

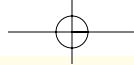
This was built during the period 1463-1470 by Sultan Muhammad Fatih and contains his grave. It is one of the most remarkable historical mosques anywhere in the world, a true work of art, with spacious courtyards surrounding it from all sides, and madressahs and other buildings within its confines. Other works by Sinan include the Rustam Pasha Mosque, an astonishing design built in 1561 on the orders of Rustam Pasha, the prime minister. In an old area on the left side of the Golden Horn is located the Abu Ayyub al-Ansari Mosque, which contains al-Ansari's grave. Shaykh Aaq Shamseddin, mentor of Sultan Muhammad Fatih, ordered this mausoleum

to be constructed in memory of al-Ansari.

The area of Ayyub, which is one of the oldest parts of Ottoman Istanbul, contains many old buildings and schools, as well as charitable houses for feeding the poor and markets surrounding the mosque. There is still a flavour of the past in the area's magnificent architectural designs, its unique sense of geometry indicating the progressive standards in Islamic architecture of the time, and the sheer sense of endeavour in building such marvellous places.

The Abu Ayyub al-Ansari Mosque has a public entrance which can be met after crossing the main courtyard which leads to the internal courtyard. The latter has a *rawaq*, for ablution purposes, and a few old trees with huge trunks that are hundreds of years old. Another entrance leads to a third internal courtyard in the middle of which is an old tree with an exceptionally large trunk - as wide as a room - and a more modern building. Stay to the right side and you will be led into the mosque. The left side of this courtyard includes the mausoleum of al-Ansari, where you might notice pilgrims in the proximity of the shrine reciting Islamic invocations.

The mosque was extended during the ➔



إسطنبول Istanbul



The idea of the Turkish bath actually goes back to when the Turks, having settled in the region of Anatolia, brought with them a particular style of hamam which was then assimilated into pre-existing local Roman and Byzantine fashions.

period of Sultan Ahmed III (1703-1730) and the height of the two minarets was also increased in order to enable lamps to be hung between them during the holy fasting month of Ramadhan. The mosque, which was designed by the architect Aouzon Hussein, can be described as generally rectangular in shape. Its large dome is fixed on arches built on eight poles. There are, in addition, twelve poles of marble and thirteen smaller domes inside the internal courtyards. The ceilings of these domes, the various pavilions and ladies' courtyards are all richly decorated with beautiful ornaments.

Yeni Mosque

This is also known as the New Mosque and is located in Aminono. It was built during the period 1597-1663 and is distinguished by its design and the fact that it overlooks the Bosphorus Straits and the famous Galata Bridge.

Istanbul also has many historical churches, notable among them the Aya Sofia, which is today one of the country's leading museums and a magnificent example of the city's Byzantine past. It was originally built by the emperor Constantine and later, in the 6th Century, rebuilt by the emperor

Justinian. Its dome is 55 metres high and the church itself is decorated with the most resplendant mosaic.

Among other famous museums in the city are the Archaeological Museum situated in the first courtyard of Topkapi Palace;

The Turkish Ceramic Museum - Cinili Kosk - built by Sultan Fatih in the 15th Century, which includes a collection of celebrated Iznik ceramics from the 16th Century as well as some pieces of Seljuk and Ottoman pottery;

St Irene Museum, which was the first church in Istanbul under the aegis of Emperor Constantine in the 4th Century - this was also renovated and largely reconstructed later by Emperor Justinian;

The Islamic and Turkish Arts Museum which was built by Ibrahim Pasha in 1534 as his residence. This was, at the time, the largest residence built during the period of Ottoman rule and includes ceramic collections, examples of metal handicraft, wooden inscriptions and woodworks, textiles and the oldest rugs in the world.

The Turkish Rugs Museum, which includes some of the oldest kilims and rugs collected from different parts of Turkey, is not far from the arts museum (above).

The Mosaic Museum includes magnificent pieces of mosaic from the 5th and 6th Byzantine Centuries.

Turkish Baths (Hamams)

Istanbul is renowned for its baths. The main *hamam* is the Cagalogu Hamam which Sultan Mahmoud I built in 1714. Its marble pieces are a distinct example of foreign architecture brought into the Ottoman state. The idea of the Turkish bath actually goes back to when the Turks, having settled in the region of Anatolia, brought with them a particular style of *hamam* which was then assimilated into pre-existing local Roman and Byzantine fashions. Mix with that the Islamic emphasis on cleanliness and we have what eventually developed into the familiar Turkish bath we know and love.

Markets

One of the more traditional and fascinating markets in Istanbul, linking the past ➔





محلات بيع البهارات والحبوب داخل سوق مصر المسقف
Spice Market inside the Misir Souk



سوق مصر المسقف
The covered Misir Souk

with the present through its invaluable possessions, is Kapali Carsisi, or The Covered Bazaar. This is the richest and most impressive bazaar in Istanbul, containing many different types of goods, including jewellery, silverwork, accessories, copperwork and metalcraft, rugs and kilims, leather, marble, art antiques, and general gifts. There are four thousand shops in this market, among which are some cafes and restaurants. The market is always busy with visitors and local people as well as tourists who come from different parts of the world.

Misir Carsisi, or Spice Bazaar, next to Yeni Mosque in Aminono, is distinguished by its oriental displays of Turkish delight, spices, including varieties of pepper, and cereals. There are also shops here that sell gold and silverware, including fashion and other accessories.

Those looking for more modern goods can visit the markets between Taksim and Shishli, or the luxury fashion shops (including jewellery, shoes, bags and leather items on display) at Istiqlal (lit. Independence) Street, Jumhuriyah (lit. Republic) Street and Jadeh Romli. Today, Turkish industry is recognized for the superior quality goods it produces and its merchants' professionalism in international markets. Indeed, Turkish influence on leather throughout western fashion is well known.

Other shopping centres in Istanbul include the Atakoy Galleria Mall, Akmerkez Mall in Atiler, the Commercial Capitol Shopping Centre on the Asian side of the city, and the markets on Kadikoy and Bagdat Avenues. The area of Beyazid is renowned for its collection of old and new books (Sahaflar Carsisi) and Beyazid market is noted for



السوق المسقف
Covered Bazaar (Kapali Carsi)

clothes, shoes, leather, and so on.

The trip across the waterways should also attract the visitor to Istanbul, particularly to Princes' Islands, a chain of nine islands in the Sea of Marmara that contain luxury houses dating to the 19th Century. Buyukada is the largest of these and one can enjoy a carriage tour of this island which, uniquely, has no cars on its streets. Another beautiful area to visit is Kilius. This is 25 kilometres from Istanbul and located on the Black Sea coast with its beautiful beaches and breathtaking sights.

Tourism Revenues

Turkey is doing its utmost to benefit from the tourism sector. The number of tourists to the country reached to 9.7 million in 1998 and revenues from this reached US\$8.2bn the same year. According to figures provided by the International Tourism Organization, Turkey has been listed as Number 19 out of 40 top international tourism destination countries. Moreover, revenue from tourism has contributed 19.6% to the export sector. This year there are plans to receive an estimated 12 million visitors. ■