

Istanbul

The Authentic Global City

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Istanbul is the only city in the world that was a capital of two major empires: the Byzantine and the Ottoman. The simplistic idea that Istanbul is a city where "West" meets "East" does not take into account that two major Mediterranean world cultures had their centers in the city. Istanbul is the "root" and the "authentic centre" of multiculturalism and hybridity. Only a few cities in the world may genuinely claim historical and cultural multi-layers: Jerusalem and Damascus - although they are not on par with the Greek-Turkish Constantinople-Istanbul. ➔



The Sultan Ahmet Mosque

جامع السلطان أحمد



Small Charming Hotels in Sultanahmet فنادق صغيرة جميلة في سلطان أحمد



Do You Need A Traditional Cold Drink? هل تحتاج إلى شراب تقليدي بارد؟



Taksim - The Modern Center of Istanbul تقسيم - مركز استانبول الحديث



Galata Bridge and the Beyoglu Hill جسر قلاتا وتل بيوغلو

The ancient quarter of Sultanahmet is an ancient site of multiculturalism. It is home to the Church-Mosque-Museum of Ayasofia (Hagia Sofia, the Blue Mosque) the Sultan Ahmet Mosque, the Roman Hippodrome, the Ottoman Palace of Topkapi Saray and the huge Roman Byzantine underground water reservoir of Yerebatan. The modern quarter of Beyoglu, especially Taksim Square and Istiklal Street, symbolizes the cosmopolitan setting and the cultural openness of the city. The geographical landscape is a stage where multiculturalism plays and socio-historical hybridity is embedded. The water spaces of the Golden Horn and Bosphorus divide and at the same time connect the three major parts of the city. Waterfronts and

bridges shape the city's atmosphere and design. The sea connects in Istanbul where elsewhere it divides. The Bosphorus connects the Mediterranean with the Black Sea just as it connects the European and Asian parts of the city. When in Istanbul, it is impossible to accept the various theories that divide people into different civilizations and confronting cultures. Istanbul means the continuity of common human civilization and the common roots of its cultural modifications and reflections. Where do the Roman baths end and the Turkish ones start? Are they not all a part of the human need to keep clean? Where do churches end and mosques begin? Are they not all part of a practice of belief and prayer? Where does

Europe end and Asia begin? Are not both a part of the geographical Eurasia and the cultural Mediterranean? To think about this in the abstract is one thing, but seeing it "live" in Istanbul is something else again. Located in the heart of the so-called "Old World", a historical "gate" for soldiers, traders, explorers, researchers, colonialists, dreamers and lovers, Istanbul, like no other city, shows that "Orient" and "Occident" are just ideological constructions with political aims. In the last 20 years, a lot has been done in the city in terms of renovation and reconstruction of historical and cultural monuments and quarters. Again, it is the quarter of Sultanahmet where the main activities have been taking place. Many ➤

old houses have been transformed into small hotels, cafes, restaurants and handcraft shops. Romantic settings have been mushrooming, giving the area a new image and flair.

Some hundred meters to the East of Sultanahmet, the old fishermen's quarter of Kumkapi has been transformed into a pedestrian precinct with many charming and cozy fish restaurants. The Grand Bazaar in the northern part of Sultanahmet and the Egyptian Bazaar in Eminonu are still the most famous traditional shopping areas in the city. The "oriental" bazaars have been attracting millions of people from all over the world, but especially from the neighboring Balkan countries, the Arab World, the Caucasus, Russia, Central Asia and Iran. The mixture of nations and languages is particularly visible in the beautiful and busy bathhouses of the city. Many Hamams for men and women offer relaxation and pure enjoyment for thousands of daily local and foreign visitors. Trade, shipping and tourism shape the cosmopolitan setting in Istanbul in a unique way. The diversity of Turkish society itself in terms of lifestyles and dress codes provides a rich multicultural framework for tourists and migrants. A mixture of an easy-going atmosphere and tolerance dominates the city. This is a present-day reflection of diverse empires, ethnic groups and "histories".

Turkey today presents a unique experiment in the Islamic world where the secular social and political orders implemented by Kamel Ataturk converge upon an elected pragmatic Islamic-oriented government. The liberalization of the political and social spheres in the country has reached the ethnic minorities. The Kurdish language and culture, for example, are visible in Istanbul. Of course, the country still has a long way to go towards democracy and the change in Istanbul does not reflect the situation in the whole country. Nevertheless, Turkey has an impressive record of improving human rights and of social and political liberalization, in which the current government of Tayeb Rajeb Erdogan has played a major role.

The Turkish model of secular-Islamic co-existence has resulted in the country's growing popularity and recognition both in Europe and the Arab World. The ➤



Cozy Cafes in Sultanahmet

مقهى في سلطان أحمد



At The Egyptian Bazar in Eminonu

في السوق المصري في أمينونو



Cafes and Parks are Everywhere

مقاهي وحدائق في كل مكان



Dolmepahge Palace

قصر دولمباغجي



Bridging the Continents

جسر بين القارتين

European Union is planning to start negotiations with Turkey on possible membership despite the strong resistance of European conservative parties and lobbies. The European conservatives argue that there

is no place for a big country with a different cultural background, namely a Muslim background, in the Union. It looks as though the core of the ideologies of European conservative circles regarding their Muslim

neighbors have not changed or become enlightened in the last ten centuries. Other arguments about the economic situation and standards of democracy lose credibility if Turkey is compared with the Baltic States, Rumania and Slovenia. The pessimistic conservatives would do well to visit Istanbul as soon as possible in order to see and understand the transformations that are taking place in the country.

On the other hand, Muslims and Arabs are fascinated by Istanbul and often visit it. The increasing numbers of Arab and Iranian tourists in the streets and museums cannot be overlooked. The Arabic and Persian languages, in addition to English and Russian, are most common in the city nowadays. Arab tourists enjoy the city's cultural sites, shopping and entertainment facilities. Advertisements for restaurants and shops are often written in Arabic. First-class restaurants, where alcohol is not served, are located next to trendy discos and jazz clubs. Traditional Russian restaurants opened by migrants in the 1920s after the Bolshevik Revolution are located next to simple Turkish "lokantas". Istanbul caters for all tastes and pocketbooks, no matter how exclusive or exotic – it is a real global metropolis. ■