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## NEIGHBOURHOODS

### top picks

- **Aya Sofya** (p49)  
Justinian's most magnificent achievement never ceases to amaze.
- **Basilica Cistern** (p58)  
The Old City's watery underworld has bucketloads of atmosphere.
- **Topkapı Palace** (p62)  
This seat of the sultans deserves its spot as the city's number-one tourist attraction.
- **İstanbul Archaeology Museums** (p70)  
Home to one of the world's great museum collections.
- **Süleymaniye Camii** (p80)  
Sinan's design for Süleyman the Magnificent lives up to its patron's nickname.
- **Chora Church** (p93)  
Exquisite is the only word to use when describing these Byzantine mosaics and frescoes.
- **İstanbul Modern** (p102)  
There's more to this new art gallery than hype.
- **Dolmabahçe Palace** (p116)  
The best place to overdose on Ottoman ostentation.

# NEIGHBOURHOODS

The French writer Pierre Loti said in 1890 that of all the names that could still enchant him, Stamboul remained the most magical. We know exactly how he felt. Ever since 657 BC, when Byzas first sailed up to where the Golden Horn, the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara meet, this place has bewitched, bothered and bewildered travellers, leaving an indelible stamp on their memories.

Each of today's older neighbourhoods hold remnants of ancient Byzantium, Roman Constantinople and Ottoman İstanbul, but have also developed their own modern signatures, often influenced by the ethnic or religious groups within their boundaries. By exploring them you'll certainly develop an understanding of the city and its people. You may even, like Loti and so many visitors since, develop a life-long infatuation with their charms.

The most important area for tourists, particularly those who are visiting the city for the first time, is Sultanahmet. This is where the largest concentration of historic sights is, and where the vast majority of the city's mid-range and budget accommodation options is located. Standing in Sultanahmet Meydanı (Sultanahmet Square) and looking one way towards Aya Sofya (p49) and the other towards the Blue Mosque (p54) is an experience that stays with many people for a lifetime.

North of Sultanahmet is Topkapı Palace (p62), for centuries the seat of the Ottoman sultans. This runs down the hill to the transport hub of Eminönü, picturesquely situated at the mouth of the Golden Horn.

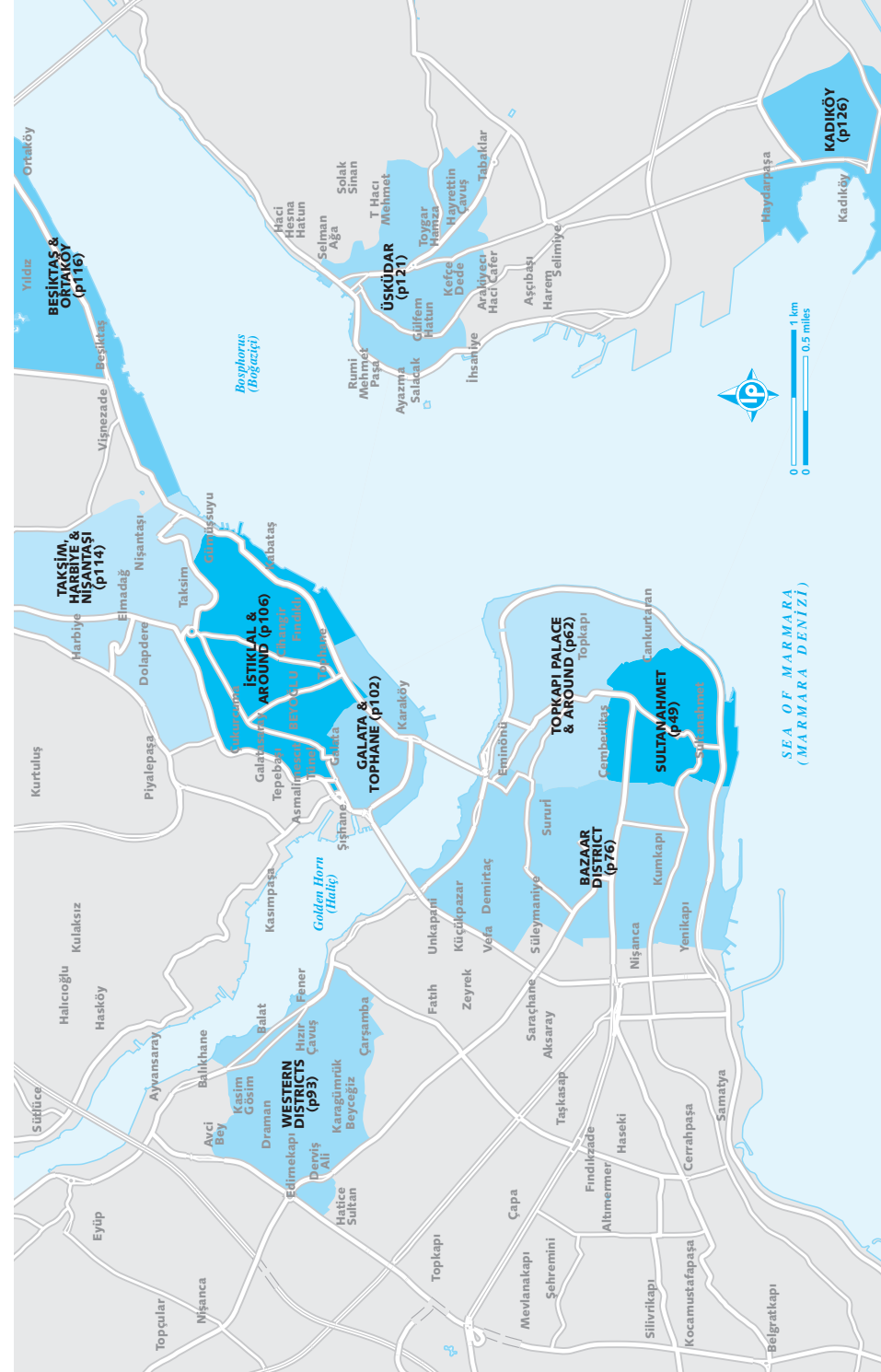
West of Sultanahmet is the beguiling Bazaar District, home to the famous Grand Bazaar (p76) and Spice Bazaar (p82), as well as a clutch of the city's most significant Ottoman mosques. Unlike Sultanahmet and the area around Topkapı Palace, this is a neighbourhood that's geared towards the needs of locals rather than tourists – İstanbullular have been shopping, studying and praying in these streets for centuries and show no sign of decamping anywhere in the future.

West of the Bazaar District, over the major artery of Atatürk Bulvarı, are the conservative Western Districts, once home to large Jewish and Greek populations and also the location of a number of historically important mosques. Running from Adnan Menderes Caddesi, which punches through Justinian's historic walls at Topkapı Gate, this neighbourhood runs down to the Golden Horn.

Writing about the Galata Bridge (p74) in the 1870s, Edmondo de Amicis said that though a hundred thousand people crossed it every day, 'not a single idea passes in 10 years'. The difference between the neighbourhoods of the Old City and the European-flavoured neighbourhoods of Beyoğlu, on the other side of the bridge, isn't as stark these days as it was in De Amicis' time, but there is still a decidedly different atmosphere and physical appearance. The bustling but still slightly down-at-heel suburbs of Galata, Karaköy and Tophane are growing more fashionable by the day, and the famous boulevard of İstiklal Caddesi and symbolic heart of Taksim Square are the places to come to eat, drink and indulge in the arts.

Down the hill from Taksim Square are the Bosphorus suburbs of Beşiktaş and Ortaköy, full of Ottoman palaces and oh-so-glam restaurants and nightclubs. The sultans' buildings here are reminiscent of Coleridge's 'stately pleasure-domes' and are well worth a visit.

These excursions along the Bosphorus stand in stark contrast to the fascinating neighbourhoods of Üsküdar and Kadıköy across the strait on the Asian side of town. Full of residents shopping in street markets, worshipping in mosques and gossiping on street corners, this is where you'll get a true feel for what it's like to live in this extraordinary megalopolis.



# GREATER İSTANBUL



### INFORMATION

American Hospital.....1 E1

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Eyüp Sultan Camii.....2 A1  
 Fatih Camii.....3 B4  
 Florence Nightingale Museum.....4 G4  
 Miniaturk.....5 B1  
 Murat Paşa Camii.....6 B4  
 Rahmi M Koç Müzesi.....7 B2  
 Selimiye Camii.....8 G4  
 Yedikule Hisar Müzesi.....9 A6

### EATING

Despina.....10 C1  
 Develli.....11 A5

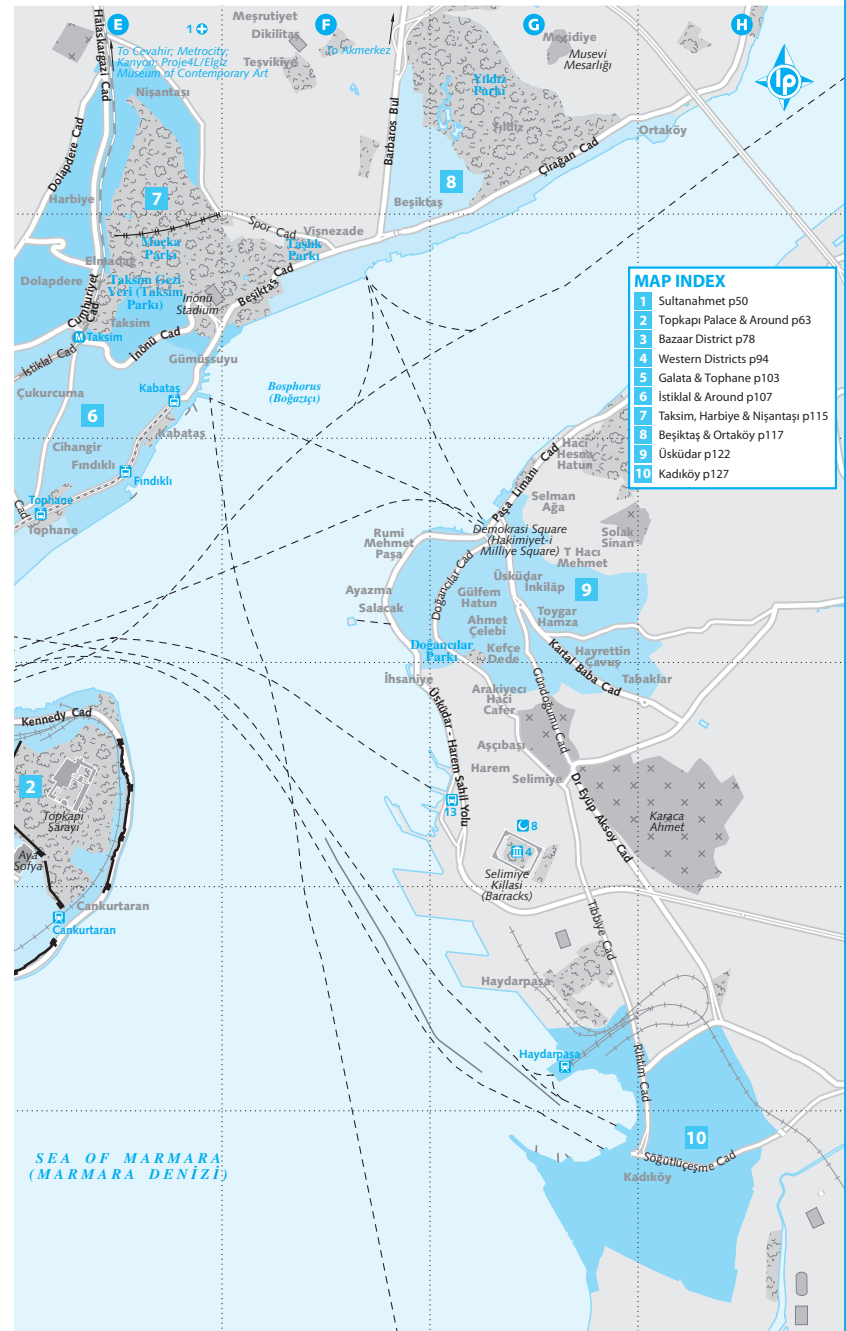
### DRINKING

Pierre Loti Café.....12 A1

### TRANSPORT

Harem Bus Station.....13 G4

0 1 km  
 0 0.5 miles



### MAP INDEX

- 1 Sultanahmet p50
- 2 Topkapı Palace & Around p63
- 3 Bazaar District p78
- 4 Western Districts p94
- 5 Galata & Tophane p103
- 6 İstiklal & Around p107
- 7 Taksim, Harbiye & Nişantaşı p115
- 8 Beşiktaş & Ortaköy p117
- 9 Üsküdar p122
- 10 Kadıköy p127

SEA OF MARMARA  
 (MARMARA DENİZİ)

## ITINERARY BUILDER

The table below allows you to plan a day's worth of activities in any area of the city. Simply select which area you wish to explore, and then mix and match from the corresponding listings to build your day. The first item in each cell represents a well-known highlight of the area, while the other items are more off-the-beaten-track gems.

Areas	Sightseeing	Eating & Drinking	Shopping
Sultanahmet	<b>Aya Sofya</b> (opposite)	<b>Teras Restaurant</b> (p158)	<b>İznic Classics and Tiles</b> (p135)
	<b>Blue Mosque</b> (p54)	<b>Mozaik</b> (p159)	<b>Cocoon</b> (p135)
	<b>Basilica Cistern</b> (p58)	<b>Hotel Nomade Terrace Bar</b> (p172)	<b>Mehmet Çetinkaya Gallery</b> (p135)
Topkapı Palace & Around	<b>Topkapı Palace</b> (p62)	<b>Set Üstü Çay Bahçesi</b> (p173)	<b>Vakko İndirim</b> (p136)
	<b>İstanbul Archaeology Museums</b> (p70)	<b>Konyalı</b> (p160)	<b>Ali Muhiddin Hacı Bekir</b> (p136)
	<b>Gülhane Parkı</b> (p72)	<b>Hafız Mustafa Şekerlemeleri</b> (p137)	<b>Sofa</b> (p136)
Bazaar District	<b>Grand Bazaar</b> (p76)	<b>Hamdi et Lokantası</b> (p161)	<b>Derviş</b> (p138)
	<b>Süleymaniye Camii</b> (p80)	<b>Zinhan Kebap House at Storks</b> (p161)	<b>Şişko Osman</b> (p139)
	<b>Spice Bazaar</b> (p82)	<b>Lale Bahçesi</b> (p174)	<b>Muhlis Günbattı</b> (p139)
Galata & Tophane	<b>İstanbul Modern</b> (p102)	<b>Tarhı Karaköy Balık Lokantası</b> (p164)	<b>İstanbul Modern Gift Shop</b> (p140)
	<b>Galata Tower</b> (p104)	<b>İstanbul Modern Cafe</b> (p163)	<b>Karaköy Güllüglü</b> (p165)
		<b>Anemon Galata Bar</b> (p175)	
İstiklal & Around	<b>Pera Museum</b> (p110)	<b>Mikla</b> (p165)	<b>art.i.choke</b> (p141)
	<b>Galata Mevlevihanesi</b> (p106)	<b>Hacı Abdullah</b> (p167)	<b>Sedef Çalarkan</b> (p141)
	<b>Çiçek Pasajı</b> (p110)	<b>Leb-i Derya Richmond</b> (p176)	<b>Lale Plak</b> (p142)
Üsküdar & Kadıköy	<b>Atik Valide Camii</b> (p121)	<b>Karga Bar</b> (p177)	<b>Greenhouse Bookshop Cafe</b> (p144)
	<b>Çinili Camii</b> (p121)	<b>Kanaat Lokantası</b> (p169)	<b>Salı Pazarı</b> (p143)
	<b>Şemsi Paşa Camii</b> (p123)	<b>Çiya Sofrası</b> (p170)	

## SULTANAHMET

Drinking p172; Eating p158; Shopping p134; Sleeping p198

Many visitors to Istanbul never make it out of Sultanahmet. And while this is a shame, it's hardly surprising. After all, not many cities have such a concentration of major sights, shopping precincts, hotels and eateries within easy walking distance. The heart of both Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire, it's the area where emperors and sultans built grand places of worship and major public buildings; where court officials lived, schemed and planned advantageous marriages; and where conquering armies declared their victories with obligatory rite of drunken pillage and plunder in the Hippodrome. Today, armies of tourists congregate around this ancient arena, their only battles being with overenthusiastic carpet touts and postcard sellers.

Occupying a large slab of the promontory that runs from the eastern side of Eminönü on the Golden Horn (*Haliç*) to Küçük Aya Sofya on the Sea of Marmara, this neighbourhood is where most of İstanbul's major sights and hotels are located. It incorporates a number of small suburbs, including Binbirdirek, which takes its name from the Byzantine cistern and is home to shops and offices; Cankurtaran, where a good percentage of the city's hotels and hostels are located; Çemberlitaş (the eastern half), a shopping district around busy Divan Yolu; Küçük Aya Sofya, a quiet residential area with some significant historical buildings and a few hotels; and Sultanahmet proper, the area around Aya Sofya and the mosque that gives the neighbourhood its name.

This is historical İstanbul, and not the hip East-meets-West city beloved of the current crop of international fashion and travel magazines. Morals and dress are conservative around here and while there's lots of money being thrown around by tourists, there's no trace of the conspicuous local consumption that is the signature over the Golden Horn and along the Bosphorus. Here, people rise early, go to work, have a home-cooked dinner and then go to bed. If you're looking for nightclubs, bars and theatres, don't look here – cross the Galata Bridge instead. On weekends, the tenor of the neighbourhood changes slightly, with residents of other city suburbs visiting to soak up some culture, eat *köfte* at Tarihi Sultanahmet Köftecisi Selim Usta (p160), wander around the Hippodrome and drink coffee in one of the new chain outlets along Divan Yolu.

The neighbourhood's major thoroughfares are Divan Yolu Caddesi, which runs from Aya Sofya up towards the Grand Bazaar; and Hüdavendigar Caddesi, which runs north from Divan Yolu down towards Eminönü. There is an excellent tram service that starts at Zeytinburnu in the city's west, runs along these two boulevards, makes its way down to Eminönü, crosses the Golden Horn and terminates at Kabataş where it transfers passengers to a funicular travelling up the hill to Taksim Square in Beyoğlu.

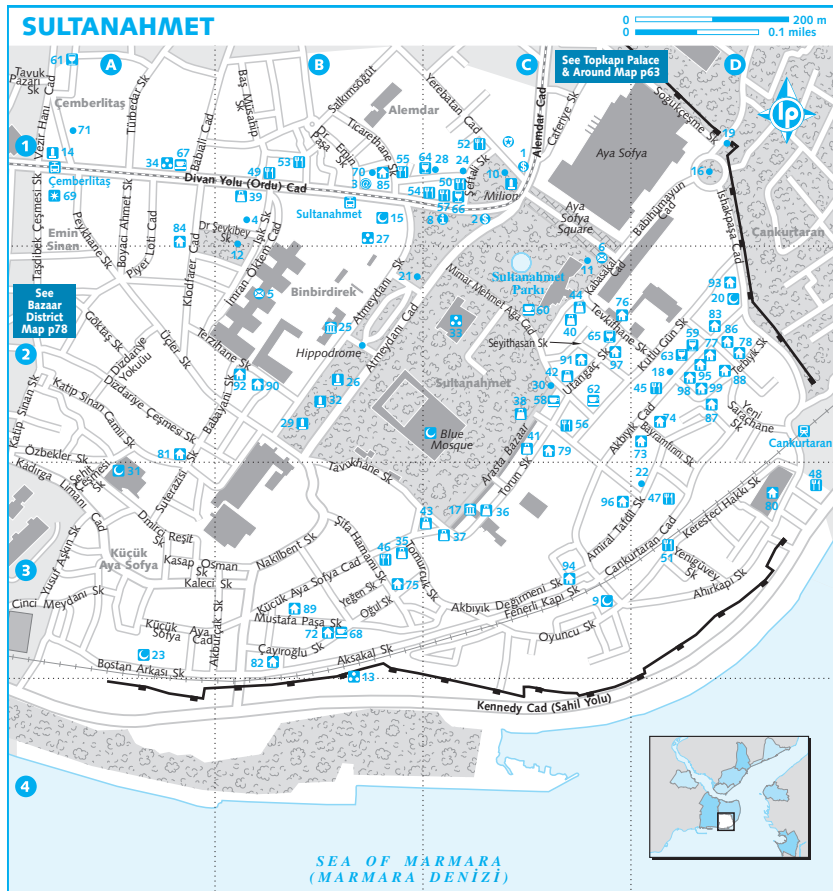
### AYA SOFYA Map p52

**Hagia Sofia;** ☎ 212-522 0989; **Aya Sofya Square;** adult/child under 6 YTL10/free, **official guide** (45 mins) €25 one person, €30 two people; 🕒 9am-7.30pm Tue-Sun, upper gallery closes 7pm; 📍 Sultanahmet

Called Hagia Sofia in Greek, Sancta Sophia in Latin and the Church of the Divine Wisdom in English, İstanbul's most famous monument has a history as long as it is fascinating. Built by Emperor Justinian (r AD 527–65), it was constructed on the site of Byzantium's acropolis, which had also been the site of two earlier Aya Sofyas – the first a basilica with a timber roof completed in 360 by Constantine's son and successor, Constantinus, and burned down in a riot in 404; and the second a building commissioned by Theodosius II in 415 and destroyed in the Nika riots of 532.

Justinian's church, which dwarfed all other buildings in the city, was completed in 537 and reigned as the greatest church in Christendom until the Conquest of Constantinople in 1453, when Mehmet the Conqueror took possession of it for Islam and immediately converted it into a mosque. As significant to Muslims as it is to Christians, it was proclaimed a museum by Atatürk in 1934. Ongoing restoration work (partly Unesco funded) means that the interior is 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, 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 his self-congratulatory tone. The



exterior may be somewhat squat and unattractive but 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.

The original achievement of Aya Sofya's architects Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus, who worked without the benefits of today's technology and materials, remains unequalled. The Byzantines gasped in amazement at the sense of air and space in the nave and the 30 million gold mosaic tiles (*tesserae*) that covered the dome's interior. Most of all, they marvelled at the apparent lack of support for the enormous **dome**. How was it possible, they asked? In fact, the original dome lasted only two decades before an earthquake

brought it down in 559. It was rebuilt to a slightly less ambitious design, with a smaller base and steeper sides, and the basilica was reopened in 563. Over subsequent centuries it was necessary for succeeding Byzantine emperors and Ottoman sultans to rebuild the dome several times, to add buttresses and other supports and to steady the foundations.

The dome, which is 30m in diameter, is supported by 40 massive ribs constructed of special hollow bricks made in Rhodes from a unique light and porous clay, resting on four huge pillars concealed in the interior walls. The great Ottoman architect Sinan, who spent his entire professional life trying to design a mosque to match the magnificence and beauty of Aya Sofya, used the same trick of concealing pillars

## SULTANAHMET

### INFORMATION

ATM.....	1	C1	Er & Ne & Met.....	37	C3
ATMs.....	2	C1	Galeri Cengiz.....	38	C2
Café Turka Internet Café.....	3	B1	Galeri Kayseri.....	39	B1
PopUp Laundry.....	4	B1	İstanbul Handicrafts		
PTT.....	5	B2	Market.....	40	C2
PTT Booth.....	6	C2	İznic Classics & Tiles 1.....	41	C2
Tourism Police.....	7	C1	İznic Classics & Tiles 2.....	42	C2
Tourist Information Office.....	8	C1	Mehmet Çetinkaya Gallery.....	43	B3
			Yeşil Ev.....	44	C2

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (pp49–61)

Akbiyık Camii.....	9	C3	EATING (pp145–8, 157–70)		
Basilica Cistern.....	10	C1	Albura Café & Restaurant.....	53	D2
Baths of Lady Hürrem.....	11	C2	Ayasofya Kebap House.....	46	B3
Binbirdirek Cistern.....	12	B1	Balkık Sabahattin.....	47	D3
Bucoleon Palace.....	13	B3	Cankurtaran Sosyal Tesisleri.....	48	D3
Çemberlitaş.....	14	A1	Çiğdem Pastenesi.....	49	B1
Firuz Ağa Camii.....	15	B1	Dubb.....	50	C1
Fountain of Sultan Ahmet III.....	16	D1	Giritli.....	51	D3
Great Palace Mosaics Museum.....	17	C3	House of Medusa.....	52	C1
Hassle Free Travel Agency.....	18	D2	Karadeniz Aile Pide ve Kebap		
Imperial Gate, Topkapı Palace.....	19	D1	Salonu.....	53	B1
İshak Paşa Camii.....	20	D2	Lale Restaurant		
Kaiser Wilhelm's Fountain.....	21	B2	(Pudding Shop).....	54	C1
Kirkit Voyage.....	22	D3	Mozaik Restaurant.....	55	B1
Küçük Aya Sofya Camii.....	23	A3	Rami.....	56	C2
Les Arts Turcs.....	24	C1	Tarihi Sultanahmet Köftçesi Selim		
Museum of Turkish & Islamic			Usta.....	57	C1
Arts.....	25	B2	Teras Restaurant.....	(see 80)	
Obelisk of Theodosius.....	26	B2	DRINKING (pp172–3)		
Palace of Antiochus.....	27	B1	Café Mesale.....	58	C2
Pride Travel Agency.....	28	C1	Cheers Bar.....	59	D2
Rough-Stone Obelisk.....	29	B2	Derviş Aile Çay Bahçesi.....	60	C2
Senkron Travel Agency.....	30	C2	Fes Cafe.....	61	A1
Sokollu Mehmet Paşa Camii.....	31	A3	Hotel Nomade Terrace Bar.....	(see 85)	
Spiral Column.....	32	B2	Java Studio.....	62	C2
Tomb of Sultan Ahmet I.....	33	C2	Just Bar.....	63	D2
Tombs.....	34	A1	Şah Pub & Bar.....	64	C1
			Seven Hills Terrace Bar.....	65	C2
SHOPPING (pp131–44)			Sultan Pub.....	66	C1
Cocoon (1&2).....	35	C3	Türk Ocağı Kültür Sanat Merkezi		
Cocoon 3.....	36	C3	İktisadi İşletmesi Çay Bahçesi.....	67	A1

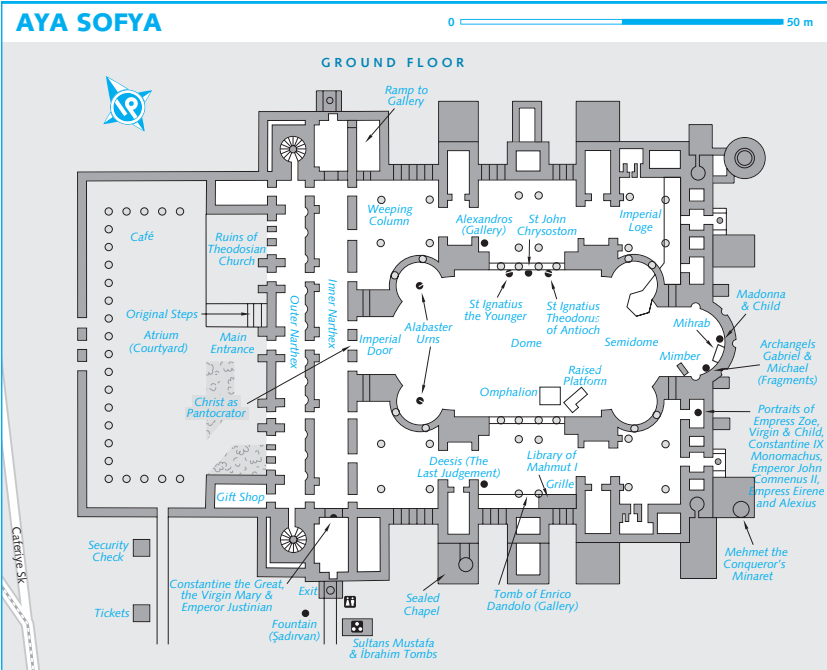
when designing the **Süleymaniye Camii** (p80) almost 1000 years later. To truly appreciate what a difference the concealment makes, we suggest that you compare Aya Sofya's pillar-free central space with that of the nearby **Blue Mosque** (p54), which features four huge freestanding pillars. You'll find that Aya Sofya shines in comparison.

In Justinian's time, a street led uphill from the west straight to the main door. Today the ticket kiosk is at the southwest side. Past the security check you'll see the sunken ruins of a Theodosian church (404–15) and the low original steps. Entering through the main entrance, all visitors are immediately struck by the ethereal beauty of the interior – this is in part due to the innumerable windows with their jewel-like stained glass. It is these windows, with the many arcades, that give the building its famous 'transparency'. Making your

way through the **outer narthex**, you'll walk through the **inner narthex** and then into the main space. Far ahead of you, in the apse at the other side of the building, is a semi-dome glowing with a gold mosaic portrait of the Madonna and Child. Above this is another semi-dome, and above that is the famous, gigantic main dome of the church, which seems to be held up by nothing.

During its almost 1000 years as a church, only imperial processions were permitted to enter through the central, **imperial door**. You can still notice the depressions in the stone by each door just inside the threshold where imperial guards stood. Also note the matched marble panels in the walls and the breccia (a type of rock made up of angular fragments) columns.

The chandeliers hanging low above the floor are Ottoman additions. Previously, rows of glass oil lamps lined the balustrades



of the gallery and the walkway at the base of the dome. Imagine them all lit to celebrate some great state occasion, with the smell of incense and the chants of the Orthodox (and later the Latin) liturgy reverberating through the huge interior space.

The Byzantine emperor was crowned while seated in a throne placed within the **omphalion**, the square of inlaid marble in the main floor. The nearby raised **platform** was added by Sultan Murat III (r 1574–95), as were the large **alabaster urns** so that worshippers could perform their ritual ablutions before prayer. During the Ottoman period the **mimber** (pulpit) and the **mihrab** (prayer niche indicating the direction of Mecca) were also added.

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. Though impressive works of art in their own right, they seem out of place here and unfortunately detract from the purity of the building's interior form.

The curious elevated kiosk screened from public view is the **imperial loge** (*hünkâr*

*mahfilî*). Sultan Abdül Mecit (r 1839–61) had it built in 1848 so he could come, pray and go unseen, preserving the imperial mystique. The ornate library behind the omphalion 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 the pillar is that of St Gregory the Miracle Worker and that putting one's finger in the hole can lead to ailments being healed if the finger emerges moist.

Upstairs in the floor of the south gallery, near the Deesis Mosaic, you will see the **tomb of Enrico Dandolo** (c 1108–1205). Dandolo, who became doge of Venice in 1192, came from the prominent Venetian family that supplied Venice with four doges, numerous admirals and a colonial empire. During the Fourth Crusade (1203–04), he diverted the Crusader armies from their goal of an assault on the infidels to an assault on the friendly but rival Christian city of Constantinople. Aya Sofya was ransacked during the assault, with the altar being destroyed. Venice got the better part of the rich spoils from the sacking

of the city, as well as numerous Byzantine territories. Dandolo ruled three-eighths of conquered Constantinople, including Sancta Sophia, until his death in 1205, when he was buried here. Tradition tells us that Dandolo's tomb was broken open after the Conquest of the city in 1453, and his bones thrown to the dogs. Also upstairs (this time in the western gallery) is a large circle of green marble marking the spot where the **throne of the empress** once stood.

As you exit the building, the fountain (*sadirvan*) to the right was for ablutions. To your left is the church's baptistry, converted after the Conquest to a tomb for sultans Mustafa and İbrahim (the Crazy). These are not open to the public. Other tombs are clustered behind it, including those of Murat III, Selim 'the Sot' II (designed by Sinan and featuring gorgeous İznik tiles) and Mehmet III. Selim's tomb is particularly poignant as it houses the graves of five of his sons, murdered on the same night in December 1574 to ensure the peaceful succession of the oldest, Murat III. It also houses the graves of 19 of Murat's sons, murdered in January 1595 to ensure Mehmet III's succession. They were the last of the royal princes to be murdered – after this, the younger brothers of succeeding sultans were confined to the *kafes* (cage) in Topkapı instead. To the southeast of the building a wall hides excavations on a section of the Great Byzantine Palace (p56). To the left of the entrance is a small Ottoman primary school built by Mahmut I in 1740.

The first of Aya Sofya's minarets was added by Mehmet the Conqueror (r 1451–81). Sinan designed the others for sultans Beyazıt II (r 1481–1512) and Selim II (r 1566–74).

### BATHS OF LADY HÜRREM Map p50

Haseki Hürrem Hamamı; ☎ 212-638 0035; Aya Sofya Square 4; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-6.30pm Tue-Sun summer, 8.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun winter; 🚻 Sultanahmet

Traditionally, every mosque had a hamam included in or around its complex of buildings. Aya Sofya was no exception and this elegant symmetrical building, designed by Sinan between 1556 and 1557, 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 Sinan designed and is widely thought to be his best. It operated until 1910 and now functions as a **carpet shop** (p135) run by the Ministry of Culture rather than a bath. Fortunately, the management of the carpet shop doesn't seem to mind if visitors wander through the building to admire the interior spaces rather than the rugs. At the time of research there were rumours around town that the lease on the building had been sold to a local entrepreneur and that he was planning to re-open the place as a tourist hamam.

Designed as a 'double hamam' with identical baths for men and women, the centre wall dividing the two has now been

### SAVING THE SOUL OF SULTANAHMET

Nurdoğan Şengüler is a member of a loose collective of Sultanahmet-based artists, academics, journalists, professional guides and businessmen who are working behind the scenes to preserve the traditional character of this historic suburb. He established a Sultanahmet-based company called **Les Arts Turcs** (p241) in 1997 that aims to, in his words, 'explore little-travelled routes of communication between cultures' through tours, workshops and other cultural events. Asked if Sultanahmet has changed much over the 10 years that Les Arts Turcs has been operating, Nurdoğan laughs and says 'yes, a lot!'. The challenge, he says, is to ensure that the area isn't totally overrun by tourism-related industries and operators. He believes that retaining the Sultanahmet tradition of being the city's home to artisans is important, and takes heart from the fact that there are still many artists working in the areas around Aya Sofya and Topkapı Palace, including those at **Caferağa Medresesi** (p73) and Celik Gulseroy's **Istanbul Handicrafts Market** (p135). Another positive initiative is the establishment of the independent *Sultanahmet* newspaper, which is published monthly in both Turkish and English and distributed free in shops, hotels and businesses around the suburb. The news isn't all good, though. As Nurdoğan says: 'The danger of the Old City losing its character is getting bigger every day. Individual businesses are being kicked out of the Sultanahmet, Grand Bazaar and Spice Market areas to make way for big tourism outfits and this will cause the area to become one big touristic ghetto.' Asked if local government is doing anything to prevent this, he says that the Eminönü municipality isn't very effective, but that the Istanbul Tourism Studio Workshop established by the mayor of Istanbul, Kadir Topbaş, is making an effort to visit local artists and small businesses and canvas their ideas about the suburb's future.

## MOSAICS

Justinian was understandably proud of Aya Sofya's great dome, but he was just as proud of its magnificent mosaic work. Originally, the great dome, the semidomes, the north and south tympana (semicircles) and the vaults of narthex, aisles and galleries were all covered in gold mosaics. Remnants exist and are a highlight of any visit, but one can only imagine what the place must have looked like when the entire interior glittered and gleamed with *tesserae*. Unsurprisingly, when the Turks took Constantinople and converted Hagia Sofya to a mosque, they decided that the mosaics had to go: fortunately they were covered with plaster rather than destroyed, and some were successfully uncovered and restored by Swiss architects Gaspere and Guiseppo Fossati, working for the sultan, from 1847 to 1849. Though once again covered (this time by paint), they were left in good condition for a final unveiling when the mosque was deconsecrated and the museum opened.

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 **Alexandros**. In the apse is a wonderful mosaic of the **Madonna and Child**; nearby mosaics depict the archangels **Gabriel** and **Michael**, though only fragments of Michael remain. Above the imperial door in the inner narthex there is a striking depiction of **Christ as Pantocrator** (Ruler of All). He holds a book that carries the inscription 'Peace be with you. I am the Light of the World' and to his right an emperor (probably Leo VI) prostrates himself. As you exit the inner narthex and enter the passage to leave the building, 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.

The upstairs galleries house the most impressive of Aya Sofya's mosaics and mustn't be missed. They can be reached via a switchback ramp at the northern end of the inner narthex. The magnificent **Deesis Mosaic** (The Last Judgement) 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 eastern (apse) end of the south gallery is the famous mosaic portrait of **Empress Zoe** (r 1028–50). When this portrait was done she was 50 years old and newly married to the aged Romanus III Argyrus. Upon Romanus' death in 1034, she had his face excised from the mosaic and that of her virile new husband, Michael IV, put in its place. Eight years later, with Michael dead from an illness contracted on campaign, Zoe and her sister Theodora ruled as empresses in their own right, but did it so badly that it was clear she had to marry again. At the age of 64, Zoe wed an eminent senator, Constantine IX Monomachus, whose portrait remains only because he outlived the empress. The inscription reads 'Constantine, by the Divine Christ, Faithful King of the Romans'.

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 Comnenus II** (Johannes 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.

breached by a small doorway. Both sides have separate entrances and the three traditional rooms: first the square *camekan* for disrobing (on the men's side, this has a pretty marble fountain and stained-glass windows); then the long *soğukluk* for washing; and finally the octagonal *hararet* for sweating and massage. The most impressive features are the domes, with their star-like apertures. Also of note are the four *eyvan* (niches) and the four semi-private washing rooms in the *hararet*, as well as the *göbektaş* (hot platform) in the men's bath, which is inlaid with coloured marble. In all, the place gives a good idea of how hamams are set up – perfect for those not convinced that they want to bare all in one of the city's still-functioning establishments.

## BLUE MOSQUE Map p50

**Sultan Ahmet Camii**; ☎ 212-518 1319; Hippodrome; donation requested; ☒ closed during prayer times; 🕌 Sultanahmet

With this mosque, Sultan Ahmet I (r 1603–17) set out to build a monument that would rival and even surpass the nearby **Aya Sofya** (p49) in grandeur and beauty. So enthusiastic was the sultan about his grand project that he is said to have worked with the labourers and craftsmen on site, pushing them along and rewarding extra effort. Ahmet did in fact come close to his goal of rivalling Aya Sofya, and in so doing achieved the added benefit of making future generations of hotel owners in Sultanahmet happy – a 'Blue Mosque view' from the roof terrace being the number-one selling point of the fleet of hotels in the area.

The mosque's architect, Mehmet Ağa, who had trained with Sinan, 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 more minarets than any other Istanbul mosque (in fact, there was consternation at the time of its construction that the sultan was being irreverent in specifying six minarets – the only equivalent being in Mecca) and the courtyard is the biggest of all 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. No wonder its picture graces a million postcards!

In order to fully appreciate the mosque's design you should approach it via the middle of the Hippodrome rather than walking straight from Sultanahmet Park through the crowds. When inside the courtyard, which is the same size as the mosque's interior, you'll be able to appreciate the perfect proportions of the building. Walk towards the mosque through the gate in the peripheral wall, noting on the way the small dome atop the gate: this is the motif Mehmet Ağa uses to lift your eyes to heaven. As you walk through the gate, your eyes follow a flight of stairs up to another gate topped by another dome; through this gate is yet another dome, that of the ablutions fountain in the centre of the mosque courtyard. As you ascend the stairs, semidomes come into view: first the one over the mosque's main door, then the one above it, and another, and another. Finally the **main dome** crowns the whole, and your attention is drawn to the sides, where forests of smaller domes reinforce the effect, completed by the **minarets**, which lift your eyes heavenward.

The mosque is such a popular tourist sight that admission is controlled so as to preserve its sacred atmosphere. In the tourist season (May to September), only worshippers are admitted through the main door; tourists must use the north door. Shoes must be taken off and women who haven't brought their own headscarf or are too scantily dressed will be loaned a headscarf and/or robe. There's no charge for this, but donations for the mosque are requested.

Inside, the **stained-glass windows** and **Iznik tiles** immediately attract attention. Though the

windows are replacements, they still create the luminous effects of the originals, which came from Venice. The tiles line the walls, particularly in the gallery (which is not open to the public). There are so many of these tiles that the Iznik workshops producing the finest examples could not keep up with demand, and alternative, less skilled, workshops were called in to fill the gap. The mosque's tiles are thus of varying quality.

You can see immediately why the mosque, which was constructed between 1606 and 1616, over 1000 years after Aya Sofya, is not as daring as its predecessor. Four massive **'elephant's feet' pillars** hold up the less ambitious dome, a sturdier solution lacking the innovation and grace of the dome in Justinian's cathedral.

The semidomes and the dome are painted in graceful **arabesques**. Of note in the main space are the **imperial loge**, covered with marble latticework, which is to the left of the mihrab; the mihrab itself, which features a piece of the sacred **Black Stone from the Kaaba** in Mecca; and the high, elaborate **mahfil** (chair) from which the imam gives the sermon on Friday. The beautifully carved white marble **mimber** with its curtained doorway at floor level features a flight of steps and a small kiosk topped by a spire.

Mosques built by the great and powerful usually included numerous public-service institutions. Clustered around the Blue Mosque were a *medrese* (theological college); an *imaret* (soup kitchen) serving the poor; a hamam so that the faithful could bathe on Friday, the holy day; and shops (the Arasta Bazaar), the rent from which supported the upkeep of the mosque.

The *türbe* (tomb) of the Blue Mosque's great patron, the **Tomb of Sultan Ahmet I** (donation expected; 🕒 9.30am–4.30pm), is 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. Buried with Ahmet are his wife, Kösem, who was strangled to death in the Harem, and his sons, Sultan Osman II, Sultan Murat IV and Prince Beyazıt (murdered by Murat). Like the mosque, the *türbe* features fine Iznik tiles.

## GREAT PALACE MOSAICS MUSEUM

Map p50

**Büyüksaray Mozaik Müzesi**; ☎ 212-518 1205; Torun Sokak; admission YTL5; 🕒 9am–4.30pm Tue–Sun; 🕌 Sultanahmet

When archaeologists from the University of Ankara and the University of St Andrews (Scotland) dug at the back of the Blue Mosque in the mid 1950s, they uncovered a stunning mosaic pavement dating from early Byzantine times. Restored from 1983 to 1997, it is now preserved in this museum.

Thought to have been added by Justinian (r 527–565) to the Great Byzantine Palace (below), the pavement is estimated to have measured from 3500 to 4000 sq metres in its original form. The 250 sq metres that is preserved here is the largest discovered remnant – the rest has been destroyed or remains buried underneath the Blue Mosque and surrounding shops and hotels.

The pavement is filled with bucolic imagery as well as intricate hunting and mythological scenes. Note the gorgeous ribbon border with heart-shaped leaves surrounding the mosaic. In the westernmost room is the most colourful and dramatic picture, that of two men in leggings carrying spears and holding off a raging tiger. Also here is an amusing depiction of a donkey kicking its load and rider off its back.

The museum has informative panels documenting the floor's rescue and renovation.

## HIPPODROME Map p50

### Sultanahmet

The Hippodrome (Atmeydanı) was the centre of Byzantium's life for 1000 years and of Ottoman life for another 400 years. It was the scene of countless political dramas during the long life of the city. In Byzantine times, the rival chariot teams of 'Greens' and 'Blues' had separate sectarian connections. Support for a team was akin to membership of a political party and a team victory had important effects on

## GREAT BYZANTINE PALACE

Constantine the Great built the Great Byzantine Palace soon after he founded Constantinople in AD 324. It was renovated and added to by successive Byzantine leaders. The opulent palace was a series of buildings set in parklands and terraces, stretching from the Hippodrome over to Aya Sofya and down the slope, ending at the sea walls and the Bucoleon Palace (Map p50). The palace was abandoned in the 13th century and its ruins were covered in earth and built upon after the Conquest.

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 that caused the downfall of Abdül Hamit II and the repromulgation of the Ottoman constitution.

Though the Hippodrome might be the scene of their downfall, Byzantine emperors and Ottoman sultans outdid one another in beautifying it. Unfortunately, many priceless statues carved by ancient masters have disappeared from their original homes here. Chief among the villains responsible for such thefts were the soldiers of the Fourth Crusade, who invaded Constantinople, a Christian ally city, in 1204. After sacking Aya Sofya, they tore all the bronze plates from the stone obelisk at the Hippodrome's southern end in the mistaken belief that they were gold. The crusaders also stole the famous *quadriga*, or team of four horses cast in bronze, a copy of which now sits atop the main door of the Basilica di San Marco in Venice (the original is inside the basilica).

The level of the Hippodrome rose over the centuries, as successive civilisations piled up their dust and refuse here. A number of its monuments were cleaned out and tidied up by the British troops who occupied the city after the Ottoman defeat in WWI.

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. According to the Ottoman inscription, the fountain was built in the Hejira (Muslim lunar calendar) year of 1316 (AD 1898–99). The monograms in the stonework are those of Abdül Hamit II and Wilhelm II, and represent their political union.

The impressive granite *Obelisk of Theodosius* was carved in Egypt around 1450 BC. According to the hieroglyphs, it was erected in Heliopolis (now a Cairo suburb) to commemorate the victories of Thut-

## RAMAZAN IN THE HIPPODROME

The Hippodrome may have been the centre of the city's life in Byzantine and Ottoman times, but this certainly isn't the case these days – that honour is proudly claimed by Taksim Square in Beyoğlu (p111). However, for four weeks of every year the Hippodrome regains its symbolic supremacy in the minds of Istanbul as the host of the city's most popular Ramadan (aka Ramadan) carnival. Every evening after İftar (the breaking of the fast at sunset) the arena is lined with temporary stalls selling fast foods, toys, dried fruits, CDs and sweets to thousands of revellers. Popular snacks include popcorn, roasted corn, *gözleme* (Turkish crepes cooked on a griddle with cheese, spinach or potato) or döner kebabs. Children beg their indulgent parents for *lokma* (a type of fried doughnut in syrup), *macun* (luridly coloured twisted candy on a stick) or fairy floss (cotton candy), and queues form at temporary cafés brewing delicious *közde kahve* (slow-cooked Turkish coffee) on charcoal braziers. Coloured lights and decorations are everywhere, music by the latest darlings of the Turkish airwaves blares from speakers, the stall-owners shout *buyurun!* (an expression meaning welcome) and the crowd is smiling and laughing, relieved to have finally eaten and drunk after a long day of fasting. If you're in town over Ramadan (see p239), don't miss it.

mose III (r 1504–1450 BC). The Byzantine emperor, Theodosius, had it brought from Egypt to Constantinople in AD 390. He then had it erected on a marble pedestal engraved with scenes of himself in the midst of various imperial pastimes. Though Theodosius' self-promoting marble billboards have weathered badly over the centuries, the magnificent obelisk, spaced above the pedestal by four bronze blocks, is as crisply cut and shiny as when it was carved in Upper Egypt some 3500 years ago.

South of the obelisk is a strange column coming up out of a hole in the ground. Known as the *Spiral Column*, it was once much taller and was topped by three serpents' heads. Originally cast to commemorate a victory of the Hellenic confederation over the Persians, 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. Though badly bashed up in the Byzantine struggle over the role of images in the church, the serpents' heads survived until the early 18th century. Now all that remains of them is one upper jaw, housed in the *Istanbul Archaeology Museums* (p70).

All that is known about the *Rough-Stone Obelisk* at the southern end of the Hippodrome is that it was repaired by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (r 913–59), and that its bronze plates were ripped off during the Fourth Crusade.

## KÜÇÜK AYA SOFYA CAMİİ Map p50

*Little Aya Sofya, SS Sergius & Bacchus Church;* ☎ 212-458 0776; *Küçük Aya Sofya Church;* donation requested; 📍 Sultanahmet

Justinian and Theodora built this little church sometime between 527 and 536 (just before Justinian built Aya Sofya) and you can still see their monogram worked into some of the frilly white capitals. It was named after the two patron saints of Christians in the Roman army. The building, which has recently been restored, is one of the most beautiful in the city. Its dome is architecturally noteworthy and its plan – an irregular octagon – is quite unusual. Like *Aya Sofya* (p49), 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.

The *medrese* cells, arranged around the mosque's forecourt, are now used by second-hand booksellers and bookbinders. In the leafy forecourt there is a tranquil *çay bahçesi* (tea garden) where you can relax over a glass of tea.

## MUSEUM OF TURKISH & ISLAMIC ARTS Map p50

*Türk ve İslam Eserleri Müzesi;* ☎ 212-518 1805; *Hippodrome 46, Atmeydanı Sokak;* admission YTL5; 🕒 9.30am–4.30pm Tue–Sun; 📍 Sultanahmet

This impressive museum is housed in the Palace of İbrahim Paşa, built in 1524 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 Istanbul 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 made in turn chief falconer, chief of the royal bedchamber 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 for poor İbrahim. His wealth, power and influence on the monarch became so great that others wishing to influence the sultan became envious, chief among them Süleyman's powerful wife, Haseki Hürrem Sultan (Roxelana). After a rival accused İbrahim of disloyalty, Roxelana convinced her husband that İbrahim was a threat and Süleyman had him strangled in 1536.

The museum's exhibits date from the 8th and 9th centuries up to the 19th century. Highlights include the superb **calligraphy** exhibits, including writing sets, imperial edicts (*fermans*) with monograms (*tuğras*) and illuminated manuscripts. In the largest room (and last room on the 1st floor) have a look at the wooden inlaid Quran stands and chests from the 16th century, as well as the colourful Turkish miniatures. This room also has an extraordinary collection of enormous **antique carpets** – whatever you do, don't miss them.

The lower floor of the museum houses ethnographic exhibits.

Labels are in Turkish and English. The coffee shop in the courtyard of the museum, which also has tables on the terrace overlooking the Hippodrome, is a welcome refuge from the press of crowds and touts in the area.

## SOKOLLU MEHMET PAŞA CAMİİ

Map p50

Şehit Çeşmesi Sokak 20-22, Küçük Aya Sofya; donation requested; ☞ Sultanahmet

Sinan designed this mosque in 1571, at the height of his architectural career. Though named after the grand vizier of the time, it was really sponsored by his wife Esmahan, daughter of Sultan Selim II. Besides its architectural harmony, typical of Sinan's greatest works, the mosque is unusual because the *medrese* is not a separate building but actually part of the mosque structure, built around the forecourt. If the mosque isn't open, wait for the guardian to appear; he may offer photos for sale and will certainly appreciate a tip.

When you enter, notice the harmonious form, the coloured marble and the spectacular **İznik tiles** – some of the best ever made. The stained glass is also particularly fine. The mosque contains four fragments from the sacred Black Stone in the Kaaba at Mecca: one above the entrance framed in gold, two in the *mimber* and one in the mihrab. Interestingly, the marble pillars by the mihrab revolve if the foundations have been disturbed by an earthquake – an ingenious early warning device – though apparently they didn't move during the earthquake of 1999 as one was 'out of order'!

## BASILICA CISTERN Map p50

Sunken Cistern, Yerebatan Sarnığı; ☎ 212-522 1259; www.yerebatansarnici.com; Yerebatan Caddesi 13; admission YTL10; ☎ 9am-6.30pm summer, 9am-5.30pm winter; ☞ Sultanahmet

When those Byzantine emperors built something, they certainly did it properly! This extraordinary subterranean structure, built by Justinian in 532 (perhaps on the site of an earlier cistern), is the largest surviving Byzantine cistern in İstanbul. Now one of the city's most popular tourist attractions, it's a great place to while away 30 minutes or so, especially during summer when its cavernous depths stay wonderfully cool.

The cistern's roof is 65m wide and 143m long, and is supported by 336 columns arranged in 12 rows. It once held 80,000 cubic metres of water, delivered via 20km of aqueducts from a reservoir near the Black Sea.

Constructed using columns, capitals and pilasters from ruined buildings, the cistern's symmetry and sheer grandeur of conception are quite extraordinary. Don't miss the two columns in the northwestern corner supported by blocks carved into Medusa

heads or the column towards the centre featuring a teardrop design – we don't know where these columns originally came from but it's great to speculate.

Walking on the raised wooden platforms, you'll feel the water dripping from the vaulted ceiling and see schools 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 tea.

Like most of the sites in İstanbul, the cistern has an unusual 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, the cistern seems to have been forgotten by the city authorities some time before the Conquest. Enter scholar Petrus Gyllius, who in 1545 was researching Byzantine antiquities in the city and was told by locals that they were able to miraculously obtain water by lowering buckets in their basement floors. Some were even catching fish this way. Intrigued, Gyllius explored the neighbourhood and finally 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 – it became a dumping ground for all sorts of junk, as well as corpses. Fortunately, later restorations, most notably in the 18th century and between 1955 and 1960, saw it properly maintained. It was cleaned and renovated in 1985 by the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality and opened to the public in 1987.

## BİNBİRDİREK CISTERN Map p50

Cistern of 1001 Columns, Binbirdirek Sarnığı; ☎ 212-517 8725; İmran Öktem Sokak 4, Binbirdirek; admission YTL10; ☎ 9am-7pm summer, 9am-6pm winter; ☞ Sultanahmet

Constantine built Binbirdirek in AD 330. During Ottoman times it was converted into a *khan* for silk manufacturers. Closed for decades, it was restored a few years ago and functions as a café and venue for exhibitions and concerts. Not as impressive as the Basilica Cistern (largely because it has been emptied of its water reserves and has a false floor), the only time this place is really worth a visit is when it hosts concerts –

check the board at its exit for details. The admission price includes one drink.

## ÇEMBERLİTAŞ Map p50

☞ Çemberlitaş

Close to the Çemberlitaş tram stop, in a plaza packed with pigeons, you'll find one of the city's most ancient and revered monuments: a derelict column known as Çemberlitaş (also known as the Hooped, Banded Stone or Burnt Column). Erected by Constantine the Great (r 324–37) to celebrate the dedication of Constantinople as capital of the Roman Empire in 330, the column was placed in what was the grand Forum of Constantine and was topped by a statue of the great emperor himself. The column lost its crowning statue of Constantine in 1106 and was damaged in the 1779 fire that ravaged the nearby Grand Bazaar. At the time of research it in the process of being restored and so was covered in hoardings.

Also in this vicinity is the historic **Çemberlitaş Hamam** (p193).

## SULTANAHEMET WALK

### Walking Tour

**1 Aya Sofya** This is the most famous **building** (p49) in Turkey, and for good reason. Built over a millennium ago by the Emperor Justinian, its design has inspired the world's architects ever since. The soaring dome, gleaming gold mosaics and innumerable stained-glass windows give it an extraordinary sense of space, mystery and majesty.

**2 Baths of Lady Hürrem** Süleyman the Magnificent built this double **hamam** (p53) in 1557 and named it for his beloved wife Roxelana. Designed by the Ottoman Empire's most famous architect, Mimar Koca Sinan, it hasn't functioned as bathhouse for a century but its interior spaces are remarkably intact.

**3 Arasta Bazaar** It's worth strolling along this historic arcade to get a feel for the mercantile history of the neighbourhood. And if you're in the mood for a spot of shopping, there are plenty of possibilities here.

**4 Blue Mosque** The funkier **mosque** (p54) in town, with more minarets and visual pizzazz than any mosque should rightly lay claim to. It takes its name from the tens of thousands

## top picks FOR CHILDREN

- Basilica Cistern (above)
- Gülhane Parkı (p72)
- Askeri Müzesi (p114)
- İstanbul Modern (p102)
- Rahmi M Koç Müzesi (p128)

of blue tiles adorning its exterior walls, but a visit makes it clear that for Sultan Ahmet, it was all about outward appearances. Still, it makes a nice spot to take a moment's contemplation.

**5 Great Palace Mosaics Museum** Accessed on the east side of the Arasta Bazaar, the huge mosaic on show at this [museum](#) (p55) once graced the floor of Justinian's Great Byzantine Palace. Mosaic images of donkeys, tigers, hunters and landscapes were miraculously preserved under the soil of centuries and are now on show after excavation and restoration work.

**6 Küçük Aya Sofya Camii** After being listed on the World Monument Fund's register of the 100 most endangered buildings, [Little Aya](#)

[Sofya](#) (p57) has been recently restored and is looking terrific. Justinian and Theodora, who built it between 527–536 BC, would be chuffed if they saw it today.

**7 Hippodrome** Rival chariot teams raced on this [course](#) (p56) in Byzantine times and Emperor Theodosius erected the Egyptian Obelisk of Theodosius that is still here 1600 years later. Fortunately, it's in better con-

dition than Constantine the Great's sad-looking Spiral Column, which lost its crown of serpents' heads in the eighteenth century. Check out the German contribution, while you are there.

**8 Museum of Turkish & Islamic Arts** Once the palace of Süleyman the Magnificent's best friend and grand vizier, this handsome [museum](#) (p57) now houses an impressive collection of carpets and calligraphy.

**9 Basilica Cistern** Investigate the watery depths of this huge Byzantine cistern (p58), which once stored water for the Great Palace. It's got atmosphere in buckets (and water, too), and two Medusa heads.

**10 Tea and Nargileh** Footsore? You have earned a shady rest-stop, so relax for a bit at [Türk Ocağı Kültür ve Sanat Merkezi İktisadi İşletmesi Çay Bahçesi](#) (p173). And if you can say that five times quickly, you'll blend right in...

## WALK FACTS

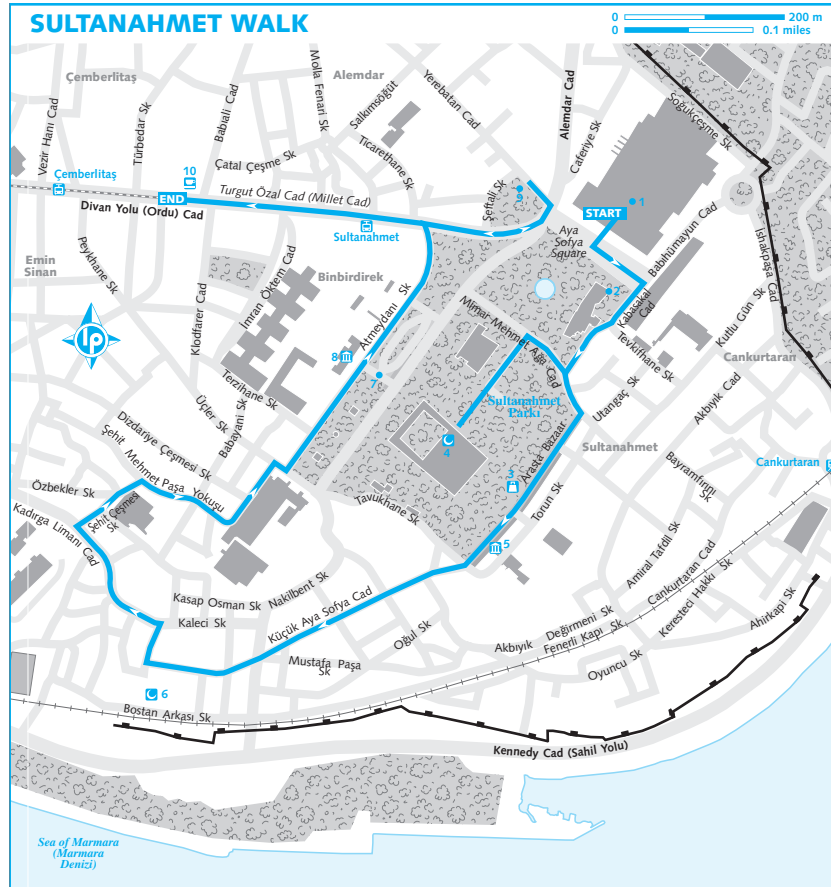
**Start** Aya Sofya

**End** Basilica Cistern

**Distance** 2.5km

**Duration** Six hours

**Fuel stops** Everywhere you look



# TOPKAPI PALACE & AROUND

Drinking [p173](#); Eating [p160](#); Shopping [p136](#); Sleeping [p203](#)

This is the neighbourhood of the Seraglio, dominated by a huge palace park stretching from Aya Sofya all the way down to Seraglio Point. It's where Mehmet the Conqueror set up house after he barged into Constantinople, and where generations of his descendants lived highly privileged but strangely cloistered lives until they decamped over the water to the European-style Dolmabahçe Palace ([p116](#)).

Centred on the magnificent Topkapı Palace, this part of the Old City is the most Ottoman in flavour and character. Here there are rows of Ottoman timber houses built into the palace walls, a Sinan-designed *medrese* ([p73](#)) built for a chief black eunuch of the court, an archaeological museum filled with plunder from the countries of the Ottoman Empire and a huge park that was once the private garden of the palace.

And then there's the pavilioned palace itself. Like the Forbidden City in Beijing or the Alhambra in Granada, this place was a world of its own, with intrigue and excess its major pastimes. As you walk through the First Court of the Palace, you can see grand Byzantine structures such as Aya Sofya and Aya Irini, but as soon as you pass through the Middle Gate and enter the Second Court all traces of that earlier age is gone. Now you're in the sultans' personal domain, with its huge Treasury, magnificent Imperial Council Chamber and exquisite Harem.

After the magnificence of the palace, it can come as a relief to visit a relatively modest, albeit beautiful, structure such as the Caferaga Medresesi ([p73](#)) or walk around the tree-filled Gülhane Parkı ([p72](#)) and claim a table at its spectacularly sited *çay bahçesi* for a restorative glass of tea. Then its back to Ottoman overkill, passing by the rococo doorway known as the Sublime Porte en route to one of Turkey's best museums, the İstanbul Archaeology Museums ([p70](#)).

This hasn't been a residential area since the sultans moved out. There's a small enclave of hotels and offices across Alemdar Caddesi, and a busy commercial precinct around Sirkeci Railway Station ([p73](#)) down on the shores of the Golden Horn. The tram between Zeytinburnu and Kabataş stops at Gülhane, which is convenient for all of the sights here.

Midway between Topkapı Palace and the Grand Bazaar is the suburb of Cağaloğlu. The major street here, Nuruosmaniye Caddesi, is home to upmarket jewellery shops and an ever-increasing number of Western coffee chain franchises. The tables at these cafés are invariably claimed by the new breed of Old City merchant, businessmen and women with laptops and mobile phone at the ready, who come here to swap news, do deals and drink horrible concoctions such as caramel latte.

The city's major transport hub is Eminönü, at the mouth of the Golden Horn. Bosphorus and Marmara ferries dock here, Galata Bridge traffic from Beyoğlu passes through, buses leave Rüstempaşa Bus Station next to the water for all parts of the city, and the tram passes through on its way between Zeytinburnu and Kabataş. If you want to observe the city's population in all of its glorious diversity, this is the place to do it.

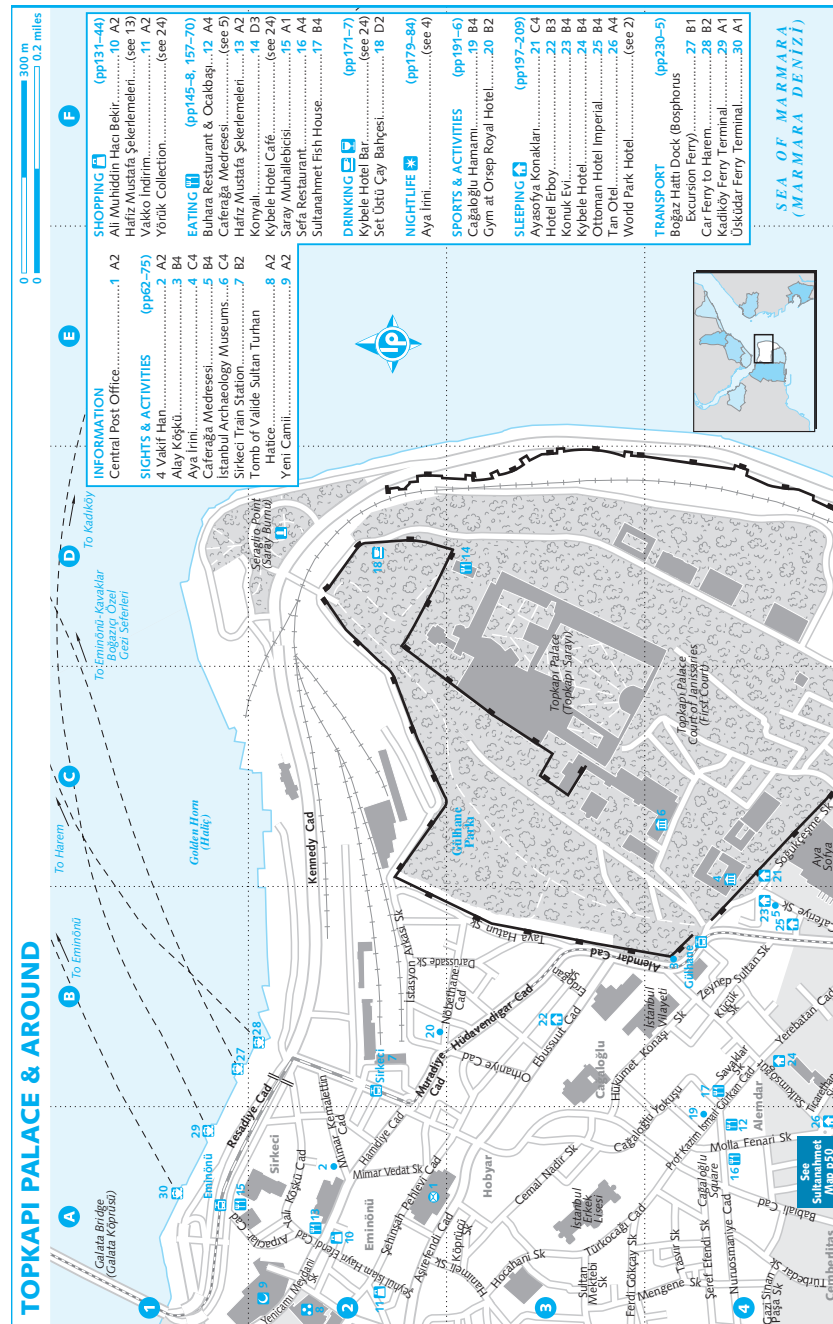
## TOPKAPI PALACE [Map p64](#)

**Topkapı Sarayı**; ☎ 212-512 0480; **Soğukçeşme Sokak, Topkapı**; admission YTL10; 🕒 9am-7pm **Wed-Mon**; 🚻 **Gülhane**

Home to Selim the Sot, who drowned in the bath after drinking too much champagne; İbrahim the Mad, who lost his reason after being locked up for four years in the infamous palace *kafes* (cages); and Roxelana, beautiful and malevolent consort of Süleyman the Magnificent, Topkapı would have to be the subject of more colourful stories than most of the world's museums put together. No wonder it's been the subject of an award-winning feature film, an opera (Mozart's *The Abduction*

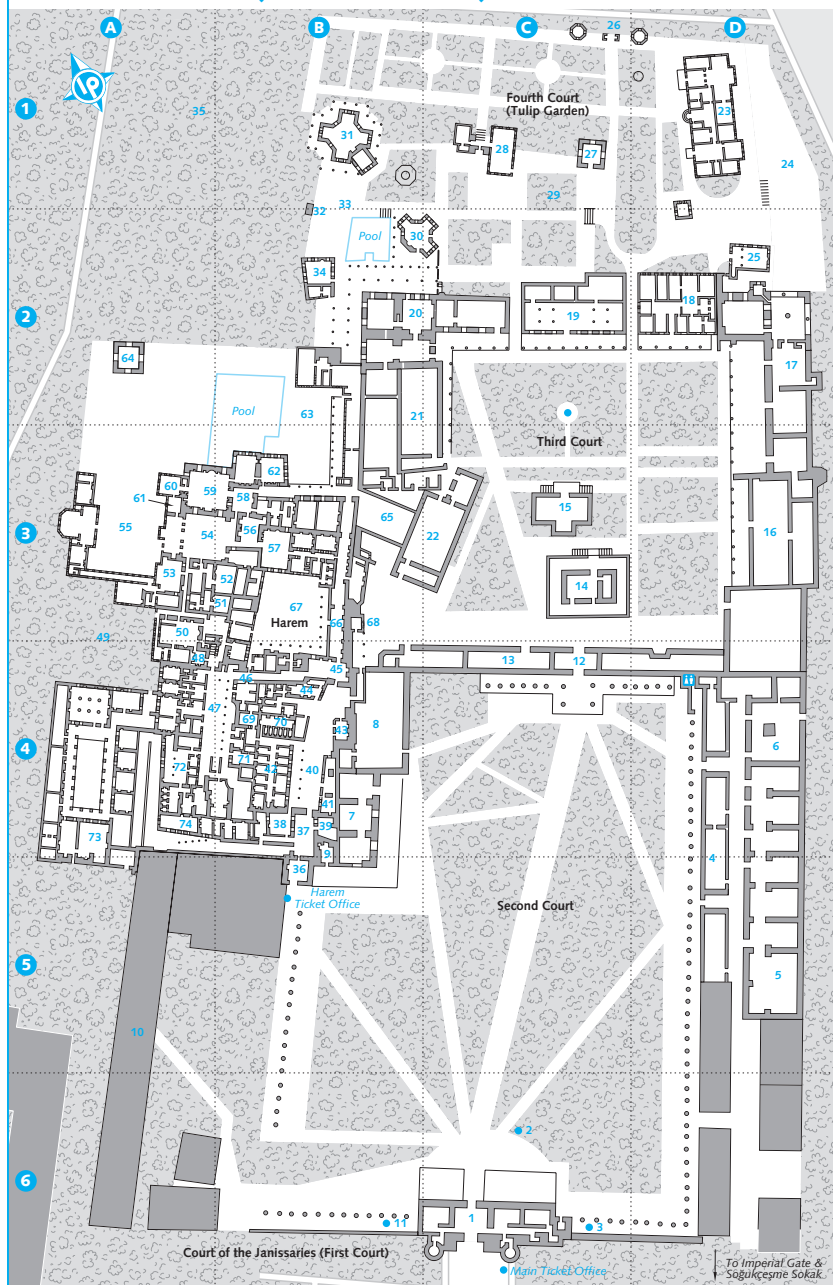
*from the Seraglio*) and a blockbuster social history (John Freely's wonderful *Inside the Seraglio*). Make sure you dedicate at least half a day to exploring, because tourist attractions rarely come any better than this.

Mehmet the Conqueror built the first stage of 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** ([p116](#)), **Çırağan** ([p119](#)) and **Yıldız** ([p119](#)) that they built on the shores of the Bosphorus. Mahmut II (r 1808–39) was the last sultan to live in Topkapı.



# TOPKAPI PALACE (TOPKAPI SARAYI)

0 50 m



## SECOND COURT

Middle Gate.....	1
Audio Tour Booth.....	2
Imperial Carriages.....	3
Palace Kitchens.....	4
Chinese & Japanese Porcelain.....	5
Helvahane.....	6
Imperial Council Chamber.....	7
Inner Treasury.....	8
Kiosk.....	9
Imperial Stables.....	10
Kiosk.....	11

## THIRD COURT

Gate of Felicity.....	12
White Eunuchs' Quarters.....	13
Audience Chamber.....	14
Library of Ahmet III.....	15
Dormitory of the Expeditionary Force (Costumes).....	16
Imperial Treasury.....	17
Museum Directorate.....	18
Treasury Dormitory.....	19
Sacred Safekeeping Rooms.....	20
Quarters of Pages in Charge of the Sacred Safekeeping Rooms (Paintings & Calligraphy).....	21
Mosque of the Eunuchs & Library.....	22

## FOURTH COURT

Meclidiye Köğkü.....	23
Konyalı Restaurant.....	(see 23)
Cafe Terraces.....	24
Sofa or Terrace Mosque.....	25
Gate of the Privy Gardens.....	26
Chief Physician's Room.....	27
Kiosk of Mustafa Pasha.....	28
Tulip Garden.....	29
Revan Kiosk.....	30
Baghdad Kiosk.....	31
İftariye Baldachin.....	32
Marble Terrace & Pool.....	33
Circumcision Room.....	34
Lower Gardens of the Imperial Terrace.....	35

## HAREM

Carriage Gate.....	36
Dome with Cupboards.....	(see 36)
Hall with Şadırvan.....	37
Black Eunuchs' Mosque.....	38
Tower of Justice.....	39
Courtyard of the Black Eunuchs.....	40
Harem Eunuchs' Mosque.....	41
Black Eunuchs' Dormitories.....	42
Harem Chamberlain's Room.....	43
Chief Black Eunuch's Room.....	44
Main Gate.....	45
Second Guard Room.....	(see 45)
Concubines' Corridor.....	46

## Concubines' & Consorts' Courtyard.....

Sultan Ahmet's Kiosk.....	48
Harem Garden.....	49
Valide Sultan's Quarters.....	50
Sultan's Hamam.....	51
Valide Sultan's Hamam.....	52
Chamber of Abdül Hamit I.....	53
Imperial Hall.....	54
Terrace of Osman III.....	55
Room with Hearth.....	56
Room with Fountain.....	(see 56)
Consultation Place of the Genies.....	57
Beautifully Tiled Antechamber.....	58
Privy Chamber of Murat III.....	59
Library of Ahmet I.....	60
Dining Room of Ahmet III.....	61
Twin Kiosk.....	62
Courtyard of the Favourites.....	63
Private Prison.....	64
Harem Mosque.....	65
Golden Road.....	66
Courtyard of the Valide Sultan.....	67
Birdcage Gate.....	68
Harem Kitchen.....	69
Imperial Princes' School.....	70
Women's Hamam.....	71
Women's Dormitory.....	72
Harem Hospital.....	73
Laundry Room.....	74

Buy your tickets to the Palace at the main ticket office just outside the gate to the Second Court. Tickets to the **Harem** (see p68) 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 cost €10 per person for large-ish groups, you need to negotiate if you're in a small group or by yourself. Alternatively, an audio guide in English, French, Italian, Spanish or German will cost you YTL5. These are available at the audio booth just inside the turnstile entrance to the Second Court. Note that the palace is undergoing a prolonged program of conservation works and its buildings are being restored. A board listing which buildings are currently closed to the public is to the left of the ticket office.

Before you enter the **Imperial Gate** (Bab-ı Hümayun; Map p50) of Topkapi, take a look at the ornate structure in the cobbled square near the gate. This is the **Fountain of Sultan Ahmet III**, built in 1728 by the sultan who so favoured tulips. It replaced a Byzantine fountain at the same spring. Typical of architecture during the Tulip Period, it features delicate Turkish rococo decorations (note the floral carvings).

As you pass through the Imperial Gate, you enter the First Court, known as the **Court of the Janissaries**, also known as the Parade Court. On your left is **Aya İrini**, also known as Hagia Eirene or the Church of the Divine Peace. There was a Christian

church here from earliest times and, before that, a pagan temple. The early church was replaced by the present one, commissioned by Justinian in the 540s. It is almost exactly as old as its close neighbour, Aya Sofya. When Mehmet the Conqueror began building his palace, the church was within the grounds and was most fortunately retained. It was used as an arsenal for centuries, then as an artillery museum and now occasionally as a concert hall (especially during the International Istanbul Music Festival, see p16). Its serenely beautiful interior and superb acoustics mean that tickets to concerts here are usually the most sought-after in town. If you're fortunate enough to be here during the festival, think about visiting the temporary box office, located outside Aya İrini, to see if any tickets are available.

Janissaries, merchants and tradespeople could circulate as they wished in the Court of the Janissaries, but the Second Court was restricted. The same is true today, as you must have a ticket to the palace to enter the Second Court. Just past the ticket windows is a little fountain where the imperial executioner used to wash the tools of his trade after decapitating a noble or rebel who had displeased the sultan. The head of the unfortunate victim was put on a pike and exhibited above the gate you are about to enter.

The **Middle Gate** (Ortakapı or Bab-üs Selâm) led to the palace's **Second Court**, used for the business of running the empire. Only the sultan and the *valide sultan* (queen mother)

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, utilising architects and workers he had brought back from his conquest of Hungary.

To the right after you enter are models and a map of the palace. Beyond them, in a nearby building, you'll find imperial **carriages** made in Paris, Turin and Vienna for the sultan and his family.

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 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 Chinese celadon porcelain, valued by the sultans for its beauty but also because it was reputed to change colour if touched by poisoned food. In a building close by are the collections of European, Russian and Ottoman porcelain, silverware and glassware. Some of the huge pots and pans that were used in the palace's heyday are exhibited in the last of the kitchens, the **Helvahane**, in which all the palace sweets were made.

On the left (west) side of the Second Court is the ornate **Imperial Council Chamber**, also called the Divan Salonu. It's beneath the squarish Tower of Justice, the palace's highest point. 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. During the great days of the empire, foreign ambassadors were received on days when the janissaries were to get their pay. Huge sacks of silver coins were brought to the Imperial Council Chamber. High-court officers would dispense the coins to long lines of the tough, impeccably costumed and faultlessly disciplined troops as the ambassadors looked on in admiration.

North of the Imperial Council Chamber is the **Inner Treasury**, which today exhibits Ottoman and European armour.

The entrance to the palace's most famous sight, the **Harem** (p68), is beneath the **Tower of Justice** (Adalet Kulesi) on the left-hand side of the Second Court. The tower is not open to the public.

If you enter the **Third Court** after visiting the Harem (and thus by the back door), 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. As is common with oriental potentates, the sultan preserved the imperial mystique by appearing in public very seldom. The Third Court was staffed and guarded by white eunuchs, who allowed only a few very important people in. As you enter the Third Court, imagine it alive with the movements of imperial pages and white eunuchs scurrying here and there in their palace costumes. Every now and then the chief white eunuch or the chief black eunuch would appear, and all would bow. If the sultan walked across the courtyard, all activity stopped until the event was over.

An exception to the imperial seclusion was the ceremony celebrating a new sultan's accession to the throne. After girding the Sword of Osman, which symbolised imperial power, the new monarch would sit enthroned before the Gate of Felicity and receive the obeisance, allegiance and congratulations of the empire's high and mighty.

Before the annual military campaigns in summertime, the sultan would also appear before this gate bearing the standard of the Prophet Mohammed to inspire his generals to go out and conquer all for Islam.

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 little kiosk to conduct the high business of state. An ambassador, frisked for weapons and held on each arm by a white eunuch, would approach the sultan. At the proper moment, he knelt and kowtowed; if he didn't, the eunuchs would urge him ever so forcefully to do so.

The sultan, seated on the divans whose cushions are embroidered with over 15,000 seed pearls, inspected the ambassador's gifts and offerings as they were passed through the small doorway on the left. Even if the sultan and the ambassador could converse in the same language (sultans in the later years knew French and ambassadors often learned Turkish),

all conversation was with the grand vizier. The sultan would not deign to speak to a foreigner and only the very highest Ottoman officers were allowed to address the monarch directly.

Right behind the Audience Chamber is the pretty **Library of Ahmet III**, built in 1719 by Sultan Ahmet III. Light-filled, it has comfortable reading areas and stunning inlaid woodwork.

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 the rich collections of imperial robes, kaftans and uniforms worked in silver and gold thread. Also here is a fascinating collection of talismanic shirts, which were believed to protect the wearer from enemies and misfortunes of all kinds. Textile design reached its highest point during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent, when the imperial workshops produced cloth of exquisite design and work. Check out the absolutely gorgeous silk kaftan of Sultan Süleyman II with its appliquéd tulip design.

Next to the Dormitory of the Expeditionary Force is the **Imperial Treasury**, which features an incredible collection of precious objects made from or decorated with gold, silver, rubies, emeralds, jade, pearls and diamonds. 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 Ahmed 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, as are the bizarre and vaguely sinister relics of the Arm and Skull of St John the Baptist, which are cased in jewels. Both had originally been in the possession of the Byzantines and fell into Ottoman hands after the Conquest.

After passing through the third room and having a gawk at the enormous gold and diamond candlesticks, each weighing 48kg, 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 **Kaşıkçı (Spoonmaker's) Diamond**, a teardrop-shaped

86-carat rock surrounded by dozens of smaller stones. First worn by Mehmet IV at his accession to the throne in 1648, it's the world's fifth-largest diamond. It's called the Spoonmaker's Diamond because it was originally found at a rubbish dump in Eğrikapı and purchased by a street peddler for three spoons.

Opposite the Treasury on the other side of the Third Court, there's 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 faïence, constitute a holy of holies within the palace. Only the chosen could enter the Third Court, but entry into these special rooms was for the chosen of the chosen, and even then only on ceremonial occasions. During the empire, this suite of rooms was opened only once a year so that the imperial family could pay homage to the memory of the Prophet on the 15th day of the holy month of Ramazan. Even though anyone, prince or commoner, faithful or infidel, can enter the rooms now, you should respect the sacred atmosphere by observing decorous behaviour, as this is still a place of pilgrimage for Muslims.

In the east entry room, notice the carved door from the Kaaba in Mecca and, hanging from the ceiling, gilded rain gutters from the same place.

To the right (north), a room contains a hair of Prophet Mohammed's beard, his footprint in clay, his sword, tooth and more. There is a glass booth here from which a seated imam chants passages from the Quran. The **felicitous cloak** itself resides in a golden casket in a small adjoining room along with the battle standard.

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. Notice the graceful, elaborate *tuğra* (monogram) of the sultans. The *tuğra*, placed at the top of any imperial proclamation, contains elaborate calligraphic rendering of the names of the sultan and his father, eg 'Abdül Hamit Khan, son of Abdül Mecit Khan, Ever Victorious'.

Other buildings in the Third Court include the **Mosque of the Eunuchs** and a small **library**.

Pleasure pavilions occupy the northeastern corner of the palace, sometimes called the Tulip Gardens or Fourth Court. A late addition to Topkapı, the [Medidiye Köşkü](#), was built by Abdül Mecit (r 1839–61) according to 19th-century European models. Beneath this is the [Konyalı restaurant](#) (p160).

West of the Medidiye Köşkü is the sultan's [Chief Physician's Room](#). Interestingly, the chief physician was always one of the sultan's Jewish subjects. Nearby, you'll see the [Kiosk of Mustafa Pasha](#), sometimes called the Sofa Köşkü. Outside the kiosk, during the reign of Ahmet III, the [Tulip Garden](#) was filled with the latest varieties of the flower. Little lamps would be set out among the tulips at night.

Up the stairs at the end of the Tulip Garden are two 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.

Utting 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 fast of Ramazan.

On 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.

### TOPKAPI HAREM Map p64

**Topkapı Palace; admission YTL10; ☎ 10.15am–7pm Wed–Mon**

If you decide to tour the Harem at [Topkapı Palace](#) (p62) – and we highly recommend you do – you'll need to buy a dedicated ticket from the ticket office outside the Harem's entrance. The fact that there is an extra entry charge means that many stingy tour companies neglect to bring their customers through here – dreadful for people on tours but great for the rest of us, because as a result it has become one of the least crowded areas of the palace. It's a welcome relief after the experience

of shuffling through the horrendously crowded Treasury, for instance.

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 more prosaic 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'.

Every traditional Muslim household had two distinct parts: the *selamlık* (greeting room) where the master greeted friends, business associates and tradespeople; and the harem (private apartments), reserved for himself and his family. The Harem, then, was something akin to the private apartments in Buckingham Palace or the White House.

The women of the 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. A favourite source of girls was Cossia, north of the Caucasus Mountains in Russia, as Cossian women were noted for their beauty.

Upon entering the Harem, the girls would be schooled in Islam and Turkish culture and language, as well as the arts of make-up, dress, comportment, music, reading, 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 were the best, to the sultan himself.

Ruling the Harem was the *valide sultan*, the mother of the reigning 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 *kadin* (wife). If a wife bore him a son she was called *haseki sultan*; *haseki kadin* 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

contrived mightily to have her son proclaimed heir to the throne, to thus assure her own role as the new *valide sultan*.

As for concubines, Islam permits as many as a man can support in proper style. The Ottoman sultans had the means to support many, sometimes up to 300, though they were not all in the Harem at the same time. The domestic thrills of the sultans were usually less spectacular, however. Mehmet the Conqueror, builder of Topkapı, was the last sultan to have four official wives. After him, sultans did not officially marry, but instead kept four chosen concubines without the associated legal encumbrances, thereby saving themselves the embarrassments and inconveniences suffered by another famous Renaissance monarch, King Henry VIII. The exception to this rule was Süleyman the Magnificent (r 1520–66), who famously married his favourite concubine, Roxelana.

The Harem was much like a village with all the necessary services. About 400 or 500 people lived in this section of the palace at any one time. Not many of the ladies stayed in the Harem all their lives. The sultan might grant them their freedom, after which they would often marry powerful men who wanted the company of these well-educated women, not to mention their connections with the palace. And the relationship was twofold: the sultan was also happy to have the women, educated to be loyal, spread throughout the empire to help keep tabs on political affairs via their husbands.

The chief black eunuch, the sultan's personal representative in administration of the Harem and other important affairs of state, was the third-most powerful official in the empire, after the grand vizier and the supreme Islamic judge.

The earliest of the 300-odd rooms in the Harem were constructed during the reign of Murat III (r 1574–95). In 1665 a disastrous fire destroyed much of the complex, which was rebuilt by Mehmet IV and later sultans.

Although the Harem is built into a hillside and has six levels, you'll only be able to visit one of these. Fortunately, the most important rooms in the complex are here. Interpretive panels in Turkish and English have been placed throughout the building.

You enter the Harem by the [Carriage Gate](#), through which Harem ladies would enter in their carriages. Inside the gate is the [Dome with Cupboards](#). Beyond it is the [Hall with](#)

[Fountain](#) (Hall with Şadırvan), a room decorated with fine Kütahya tiles from the 17th century. This is where the Harem's eunuch guards were stationed; the fountain that gave it its name is now in the Pool of the Privy Chamber of Murat III. To the left is a doorway to the [Black Eunuchs' Mosque](#); on the right is the doorway to the [Tower of Justice](#), which rises above the Imperial Council Chamber. Neither is open to the public.

Beyond the Hall with Fountain is the narrow [Courtyard of the Black Eunuchs](#) (Harem Ağaları Taşlığı), also decorated in Kütahya tiles. Behind the marble colonnade on the left are the [Black Eunuchs' Dormitories](#). In the early days white eunuchs were used, but black eunuchs sent as presents by the Ottoman governor of Egypt later took control. As many as 200 lived here, guarding the doors and waiting on the women of the Harem.

Near the far end of the courtyard on the left, a staircase leads up to the rooms in which imperial princes were given their primary schooling. These are not open to the public. On the right is the [Chief Black Eunuch's Room](#).

At the far end of the courtyard, safely protected by the eunuchs, is the [Main Gate](#) (Cümle Kapısı) into the Harem proper, as well as a [guard room](#) featuring two gigantic gilded mirrors dating from the 18th century. From this, the [Passage of Concubines](#) (Cariye Koridoru) on the left leads to the [Court of the Concubines and the Sultan's Consorts Courtyard](#) (Cariyeler ve Kadınefendiler Taşlığı). This is surrounded by baths, a laundry fountain, a laundry, dormitories and the apartments of the Sultan's chief consorts.

Next you'll go through the pretty [Sultan Ahmet's Kiosk](#), with its tiled chimney, and into the [Apartments of the Valide Sultan](#) (Valide Sultan Dairesi), the centre of power in the Harem. These rooms include a large salon, a small bedroom, a room for prayer and other small chambers. From these ornate rooms the *valide sultan* oversaw and controlled her huge 'family'. After his accession to the throne, a new sultan came here to receive the allegiance and congratulations of the people of the Harem. The later rococo mezzanine was added by the mother of Murat III in the 1580s. Of particular note in these quarters are the charming small hamam designed by Sinan and the lovely 19th-century murals featuring panoramic views of İstanbul.

## LIFE IN THE CAGE

As children, imperial princes were brought up in the Harem, where they were taught and cared for by its women and servants.

In the early centuries of the empire, Ottoman princes were schooled as youths in combat and statecraft by direct experience. They practised soldiering, fought in battles and were given provinces to administer. But as the Ottoman dynasty did not observe primogeniture (succession of the firstborn), the death of the sultan regularly resulted in a fratricidal bloodbath as his sons battled it out among themselves for the throne. In the case of Beyazıt II (r 1481–1512), his sons began the battles even before the sultan's death, realising that to lose the battle for succession meant their own death. The victorious son, Selim I (r 1512–20), not only murdered his brothers but even forced Sultan Beyazıt to abdicate and may even have had him murdered as he went into retirement.

Fratricide was not practised by Ahmet I (r 1603–17), who could not bring himself to murder his mad brother Mustafa. Instead, he kept him imprisoned in the Harem, beginning the tradition of cage life (*kafes hayatı*). This house arrest, adopted in place of fratricide by later sultans, meant that princes were prey to the intrigues of the women and eunuchs, kept ignorant of war and statecraft, and thus usually rendered unfit to rule if and when the occasion arose. Luckily for the empire in this latter period, there were able grand viziers.

In later centuries the dynasty adopted the practice of having the eldest male in the direct line assume the throne.

As he walked these corridors, the sultan wore slippers with silver soles. As no woman was allowed to show herself to the sultan without specific orders, the clatter of the silver soles warned residents of the sultan's approach, allowing them to disappear from his sight. This rule no doubt solidified the *valide sultan's* control, as *she* got to choose the most beautiful, talented and intelligent of the Harem girls for her son.

The tour passes through the private hamams and toilets of the *valide sultan* to the **Imperial Hall** (Hünkar Fofrası), decorated in Delft tiles. This grand room is the largest in the Harem and was where the sultan and his ladies gathered for entertainment, often with musicians in the balcony. Designed perhaps by Sinan during the reign of Murat III (r 1574–95), it was redecorated in baroque style by Osman III (r 1754–57).

The tour then enters the **Privy Chamber of Murat III** (1579), one of the most sumptuous rooms in the palace. Dating from 1578, virtually all of the decoration is original. It is thought to be the work of Sinan. Besides the gorgeous Iznik tiles and a copper fireplace, there is a three-tiered marble fountain to give the sound of cascading water and, perhaps not coincidentally, to make it difficult to eavesdrop on the sultan's conversations. The gilded canopied seating areas are later 18th-century additions.

Northeast (to the right) of the Privy Chamber of Murat III are two of the most beautiful rooms in the Harem – the **Twin Kiosk/Apartments of the Crown Prince** (Çifte Kasırlar/Veliahd Dairesi). These two rooms date from around 1600; note the painted

canvas dome in the first room and the fine Iznik tile panels above the fireplace in the second. The fabulous stained glass is also noteworthy.

North and east of the Twin Kiosk is the **Courtyard of the Favourites** (Gözdeler/Mabeyn Taşlığı Ve Dairesi). The Turkish word for 'favourite', *gözde*, literally means 'in the eye' (of the sultan). Over the edge of the courtyard (really a terrace) you'll see a large pool. Just past the courtyard (but on the floor above) are the many small dark rooms that comprised the **Private Prison** (*kafes*) where the unwanted brothers or sons of the sultan were kept (see boxed text, [above](#)).

A corridor leads east to the **Golden Road** (Altinyol), a passage leading south. A servant of the sultan's would toss gold coins to the women of the Harem here, hence the name. It is among the oldest parts of the palace, having been built by Mehmet the Conqueror.

The Harem tour then re-enters the guardroom with the huge gilded mirrors, then exits through the **Birdcage Gate** into the palace's Third Court.

## İSTANBUL ARCHAEOLOGY MUSEUMS Map p63

Arkeoloji Müzeleri; ☎ 212-520 7740; Osman Hamdi Bey Yokuşu, Gülhane; admission YTL5; 🕒 9am-4pm Tue-Sun (last exit 5pm); 🕌 Gülhane

It may not pull the number of visitors that flock to nearby Topkapı, but this is a stunner of a museum complex that shouldn't be missed. It can be easily reached by walking down the slope from Topkapı's Court of the Janissaries First Court, or by walking

up the hill from the main gate of Gülhane Parkı, just near the tram stop.

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 Pavilion (Çinili Köşk). These museums house the palace collections, formed during the late 19th century by museum director, artist and archaeologist Osman Hamdi Bey and added to greatly since the republic. While not immediately as dazzling as Topkapı, they contain a wealth of artefacts from the 50 centuries of Anatolia's history. Excellent interpretive panels are in both Turkish and English. A board at the entrance lists which of the exhibits are open and which are closed on the day.

The first building on your left as you enter the museum complex 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) as well as pre-Islamic items collected from the expanse of the Ottoman Empire. You can't miss the series of large glazed-brick panels depicting various animals such as lions and bulls. These beautiful blue-and-yellow panels lined the processional street and the Ishtar gate of ancient Babylon from the time of Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BC). Other treats here are the amazing 1st century BC alabaster statue heads from Yemen and the oldest surviving political treaty: a copy of the Kadesh Treaty drawn up in the 13th century BC between the Egyptians and Hittites. There are also clay tablets bearing Hammurabi's famous law code (in cuneiform, of course), ancient Egyptian scarabs and Assyrian reliefs.

On the opposite side of the courtyard is the **Archaeology Museum**, housed in an imposing neoclassical building. The major building in the complex, it features an extensive collection of Hellenic, Hellenistic and Roman statuary and sarcophagi.

A Roman statue of Bes, an impish half-god of inexhaustible power and strength who was thought to protect against evil, greets you as you enter the main entrance of the museum. Turn left into Room 1, and walk to the dimly lit rooms beyond, where the museum's major treasures – **sarcophagi from the Royal Necropolis of Sidon** – are displayed. These Sarcophagi were unearthed in 1887 by Osman Hamdi Bey in Sidon (Side in

modern-day Lebanon). As soon as they were discovered the sarcophagi were swiftly whisked out of the country in a complex operation that involved them being carried on rails laid to the coast and then rafted out to sea, where they were hoisted onto ships and brought to Istanbul. In Room 2 you will see a sarcophagus that is Egyptian in origin; it was later reused by King Tabnit of Sidon. Also here is a beautifully preserved Lycian sarcophagus made from Paros marble dating from the end of the 5th century. It depicts horses, centaurs and human figures with beautifully rendered expressions on their faces. Next to this is the Satrap sarcophagus with its everyday scenes featuring the provincial governor. After admiring these, pass into Room 3 to see one of the most accomplished of all classical artworks, the famous marble **Alexander sarcophagus** – so named not because it belonged to the Macedonian general, but because it depicts him among his army battling the Persians (long pants, material headwear), who were led by King Abdalonymos and whose sarcophagus it was. Truly exquisite, it is carved out of Pentelic marble and dates from the last quarter of the 4th century BC. Alexander, on horseback, has a lion's head as a headdress. 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.

In the next room you'll find an impressive collection of ancient grave cult sarcophagi from Syria, Lebanon, Thessalonica and Ephesus. Beyond that is a room called 'The Columned Sarcophagi of Anatolia', filled with amazingly detailed sarcophagi dating from between 140–270 AD. Many of these look like tiny temples or residential buildings; don't miss the **Sidamara Sarcophagus** from Konya.

Further rooms contain examples of Anatolian architecture from antiquity and Lycian monuments.

Turn back and retrace your steps towards the statue of Bes. The underwhelming 'Anatolia and Troy Through the Ages' exhibition is accessed via a staircase between the rooms housing the Alexander and Satrap sarcophagi; there are also toilets here.

Returning to Bes, you should then move into Room 4, the first of the museum's

statuary galleries. It and Rooms 5 and 6 exhibit a selection of fine works, including a delicate Attic horse's head in Room 6. Alexander makes another appearance (Room 7) – you'll see his bust and statue from the Hellenistic period. In Room 8 don't miss the **Ephebos of Tralles**, a statue of a young boy wrapped in a cape and leaning against a pillar. And in Room 9, which is crowded with busts, note both the stunning head of the poetess Sappho, a copy of an original from the Hellenistic period, and the exquisite head of a child from Pergamum.

Artisans at Anatolia's three main sculpture centres – Aphrodisias, Ephesus and Miletus – turned out thousands of beautiful works, some of which have been collected in Room 10. There's a beautiful relief from Aphrodisias showing the struggle of Athena and the Giants, and a statue from Miletus showing Apollo wearing ornate sandals and playing a lyre. The last room has examples of sculpture from throughout the Roman Empire. Check out the delicately carved draperies on the Roman statue of Cornelia Antonia, which dates from the second half of the 2nd century AD.

In the annex behind the main ground floor gallery there is an unimpressive mock-up of the facade of the Temple of Athena at Assos (Behramkale). On the mezzanine level above the Temple of Athena is an exhibition called **Istanbul Through the Ages**, tracing the city's history through its neighbourhoods during different periods: Archaic, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman. This is well worth a visit, particularly for its new exhibit on the excavation of the Byzantine harbour and boats at Yenikapı, uncovered in 2004 during excavation works for İstanbul's huge Marmaray transport project.

While children will be bored stiff with the naff dioramas of early Anatolian life in the **Children's Museum** found off Room 1, they will no doubt be impressed by the large-scale model of the Trojan Horse, which they can climb into.

The last of the complex's museum buildings is the **Tiled Pavilion** 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. The recessed doorway area is covered with tiles – some with white calligraphy (*sülüs*) on blue. The

geometric patterns and colour of the tiles – turquoise, white, black – on the facade show obvious Seljuk influence. The portico, with its 14 marble columns, was constructed during the reign of Abdülhamid I (1774–89) after the original one burned down in 1737.

Much of the interior of the kiosk is covered with triangular and hexagonal tiles of brown, green, yellow and blue. On display is the best collection of Seljuk, Anatolian and Ottoman tiles and ceramics in the country; these date from the end of the 12th century to the beginning of the 20th century. The collection includes İznik tiles from the period in the 17th and 18th centuries when that city produced the finest coloured tiles in the world. When you enter the first room you can't miss the stunning mihrab from the İbrahim Bey Mosque, built in 1432. Also of note is the pretty peacock-adorned fountain recessed into the wall in the room to the left at the back of the kiosk; this dates from 1590.

### GÜLHANE PARKI Map p63

**Gülhane Park;**  **Gülhane**

Gülhane Parki was once the palace park of Topkapı. Now, crowds of locals come here at weekends to enjoy its shade, street food and the occasional live concert. The trees here are lovely and the views over the water impressive, but many of the fountains and other features added in recent times are blots on the landscape – the horrible concrete water feature near the main gate being the major offender.

At the far (north) end of the park, up the hill, there is a series of terraces with a tea garden, the **Set Üstü Çay Bahçesi** (p173) offering superb views of the Bosphorus and Sea of Marmara.

To the right of the south exit is a bulbous little 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 that commemorated great holidays and military victories.

Across the street and 100m northwest of 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 offices of the İstanbul provincial government (the Vilayeti).

### SOĞUKÇEŞME SOKAK Map p63

 **Gülhane**

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 (Turing) acquired a row of 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. Turing eventually got the go-ahead (after the intervention of the Turkish president, no less) and in time opened all of the re-created buildings as **Ayasofya Konakları** (p204), 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 MEDRESEİ Map p63

 **212-513 3601; Caferiye Sokak; admission free;**  
 **8.30am-7pm;**  **Sultanahmet**


This lovely little building, 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 Services Foundation** (p237), 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** (see p161) in the courtyard.

### SİRKECİ RAILWAY STATION Map p63



**Sirkeci İstasyonu; Ankara Caddesi, Sirkeci;**  
 **Sirkeci**

The romance of the *Orient Express* and other locomotives of the era was reflected in the design for this train station, built as the terminus of European routes in 1881. Designed by a German architect, it is an excellent example of Islamic Eclecticism, an architectural movement introduced into İstanbul by European architects at the end of the 19th century. The structure replaced one of the Topkapı Palace pavilions and it

reflects this Ottoman heritage, though its clock tower, arches and large rose windows clearly mirror the neoclassicism popular in Europe at the time. At the time of research the station was still functioning as the city's terminus for European routes, though its future was uncertain.

Though the Marmaray project (see p234) may disrupt things, at the time of writing Dervishes had been conducting a **sema** (whirling ceremony);  information & bookings 212-458 8834; adult/student under 24 YTL30/25) in the exhibition hall on platform 1 at 7.30pm every Sunday, Wednesday and Friday.

### YENİ CAMİİ Map p63

**New Mosque;**  **212-527 8505; Yeniciami Meydanı Sokak, Eminönü; donation requested;**  **Eminönü** Only in İstanbul would a 400-year-old mosque be called 'New'. The Yeni Camii was begun in 1597, commissioned by Valide Sultan Safiye, mother of Sultan Mehmet III (r 1595–1603). The site was earlier occupied by a community of Karaite Jews, radical dissenters from Orthodox Judaism. When the *valide sultan* decided to build her grand mosque here, the Karaites were moved to Hasköy, a district further up the Golden Horn that still bears traces of their presence.

Safiye lost her august position when her son the sultan died and the mosque was completed six sultans later in 1663 by Valide Sultan Turhan Hadice, mother of Sultan Mehmet IV (r 1648–87).

In plan, the Yeni Camii is much like the **Blue Mosque** (p54) and the **Süleymaniye Camii** (p80), with a large forecourt and a 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. It also has an impressive mihrab.

The mosque was created after Ottoman architecture had reached its peak. Consequently, even its tiles are slightly inferior products, the late 17th century having seen a diminution in the quality of the products coming out of the İznik workshops. You will see this if you compare these tiles with the exquisite examples found in the nearby **Rüstem Paşa Camii** (p82), which are from the high period of İznik tilework. Nonetheless, it is a popular working mosque and a much-loved adornment to the city skyline.

Across the road from the mosque is the **tomb of Valide Sultan Turhan Hadice**, the woman



who completed construction of the Yeni Camii. Buried with her are no fewer than six sultans, including her son Mehmet IV, plus dozens of imperial princes and princesses. Further east, on Hamidiye Caddesi, are two of the best places in town to buy fresh Turkish delight, [Hafız Mustafa Şekerlemeleri](#) (p137) and [Ali Muhiddin Hacı Bekir](#) (p136).

### **GALATA BRIDGE** [Map p63](#)

**Galata Köprüsü;** [Eminönü](#) or [Karaköy](#) Nothing is quite as evocative as walking across the Galata Bridge. At sunset, when the [Galata Tower](#) (p104) is surrounded by shrieking seagulls and the mosques atop the seven hills of the city are thrown into relief against a soft red-pink sky, the view from the bridge is spectacularly beautiful. During the day, it carries a constant flow of

İstanbul's crossing to and from 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* (bread-rings) to Rolex rip-offs. This is Istanbul at its most magical.

Underneath the bridge, touristy restaurants and cafés serve drinks and food all day and night. Come here to inhale the evocative scent of apple tobacco wafting out of the nargileh cafés and to watch the passing parade of ferries zooming past. There's even a shop selling fishing equipment for those who aspire to emulate the anglers up on the bridge.

The present, quite ugly, bridge was built in 1992 to replace an iron structure dating

from 1909 to 1912, which in turn had replaced two earlier structures. The iron bridge was famous for the ramshackle 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 itself free of pollution. In the late 1980s the municipality started to draw up plans to replace it with a new bridge that would allow the water to flow. A fire expedited these plans in the early 1990s and the new bridge was built a short time afterwards. (The remains of the old, much-loved bridge were moved further up the Golden Horn near Hasköy.)

## **TOPKAPI WALK**

### **Walking Tour**

**1 Topkapı Palace** This [palace](#) (p62) is where the sultans and their womenfolk set up households from the time of Mehmet the Conqueror until his descendant Abdül Mescit defected to the European side of town. The sheer number of lavishly decorated buildings and treasures in them mean that you'll need at least a few hours here.

**2 Soğukçeşme Sokak** This cobbled [street](#) (p73) hugging the palace's walls is a popular thoroughfare for locals and tourists alike. Its Ottoman housing might not be original, but

### **WALK FACTS**

**Start** Topkapı Palace

**End** Gülhane Parkı

**Distance** 2km

**Time** Six hours

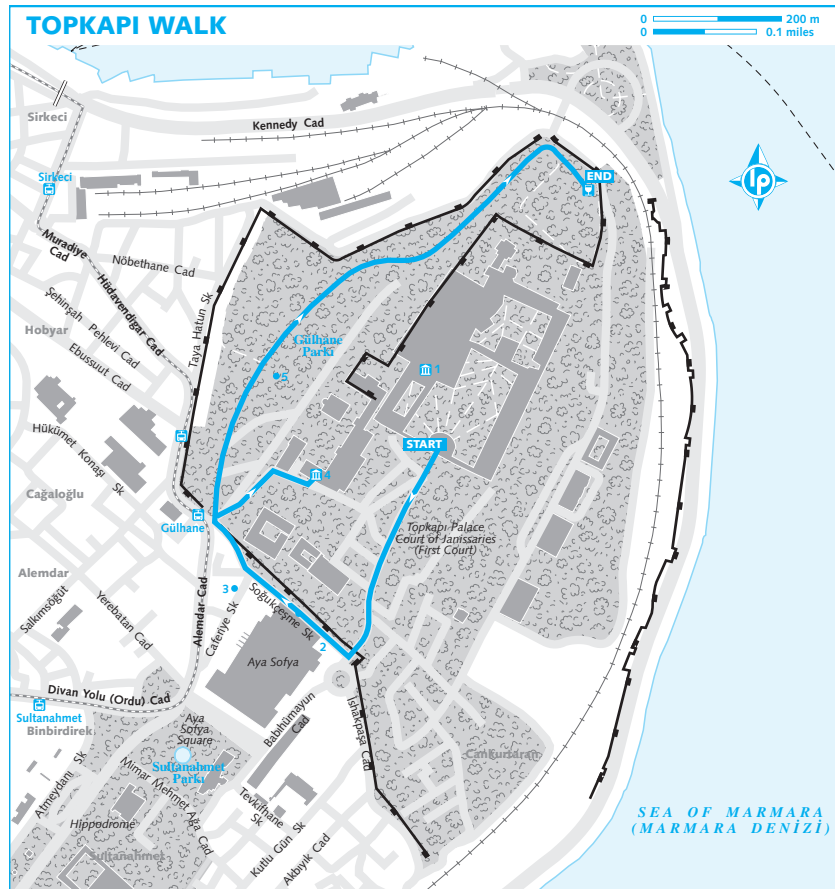
**Fuel stop** [Set Üstü Çay Bahçesi](#) (p173), [Gülhane Parkı](#)

it's certainly pretty as a picture, and well worth a wander with camera in hand.

**3 Caferağa Medresesi** [Cafer Ağa](#), who built and endowed this charming theological [college](#) (p73) in 1560, wasn't himself endowed – he was Süleyman the Magnificent's chief black eunuch. Designed by Sinan, the building is beautifully proportioned and now houses artists workshops and a small lokanta.

**4 İstanbul Archaeology Museums** This [museum](#) (p70) is one of the best in the city. Don't miss the exquisitely carved sarcophagi from the Royal Necropolis at Sidon, the huge collection of classical sculpture and the charming Tiled Pavilion of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror.

**5 Gülhane Parkı** Once the Topkapı Palace park, this oasis (p72) of tall trees and grassed terraces is a favourite picnic spot for families and courting couples. Enjoy a glass of tea at [Set Üstü Çay Bahçesi](#) (p173) while marvelling at the view over the Golden Horn and up the Bosphorus.



# BAZAR DISTRICT

Drinking [p174](#); Eating [p161](#); Shopping [p137](#); Sleeping [p205](#)

As well as being home to two world-famous bazaars – one grand and one full of spices – this district is also where you'll find the frantically busy shopping precinct of Tahtakale, located behind and to the west of the Spice Bazaar. Here, vendors with carts full of everything from *simit* (bread-rings) to strawberries make their way through narrow streets full of shoppers, delivery vans and tourists valiantly fighting their way through the chaos.

At the top of a hill mounting from the Golden Horn is the city's first and most evocative shopping mall – the venerable Grand Bazaar (Kapalı Çarşı, [below](#)), established during the rule of Mehmet the Conqueror (r 1451–81) and still going strong. Getting lost in its maze of laneways is obligatory for all first-time visitors; those who have visited previously are quick to gravitate towards their favourite shops, coffee houses and restaurants.

Near the bazaar are three great Ottoman mosques: the splendid Süleymaniye Camii ([p80](#)), the dignified Beyazıt Camii ([p80](#)), and the charming Şehzade Mehmet Camii ([p81](#)). All three provide wonderfully contemplative spaces to escape from the mercantile madness of the surrounding streets. The Süleymaniye gives its name to the suburb surrounding it and although the official name for the square on which Beyazıt Camii is located is Hürriyet Meydanı, everyone in town knows it as Beyazıt Square.

On the square is İstanbul University, one of the city's premier institutions of learning. This brings lots of students into this neighbourhood and they enliven it considerably, outnumbering the bazaar crowds in the many local *çay bahçesi* (tea gardens) and fast-food joints. If you want to sample the delights of a nargileh (the local equivalent of a drink after work), places such as Lale Bahçesi ([p174](#)) and Erenler Çay Bahçesi ([p174](#)) are where you should head.

The neighbourhood is sliced into north and south halves by Ordu Caddesi, the western continuation of Divan Yolu Caddesi. The tramline between Zeytinburnu and Kabataş runs along this major road, and there are three tram stops: Laleli, Üniversite and Beyazıt. On the southern side of Ordu Caddesi are the residential suburbs leading down to the Sea of Marmara. These include Kumkapı – famous for its fish market and fish restaurants – Gedik Paşa and Kadırga. Though not as conservative as some parts of Sultanahmet, these suburbs are resolutely working class and not at all affluent.

## GRAND BAZAAR [Map p77](#)

**Kapalı Çarşı, Covered Market;** ☎ 9am–7pm Mon–Sat; 🚶 Beyazıt

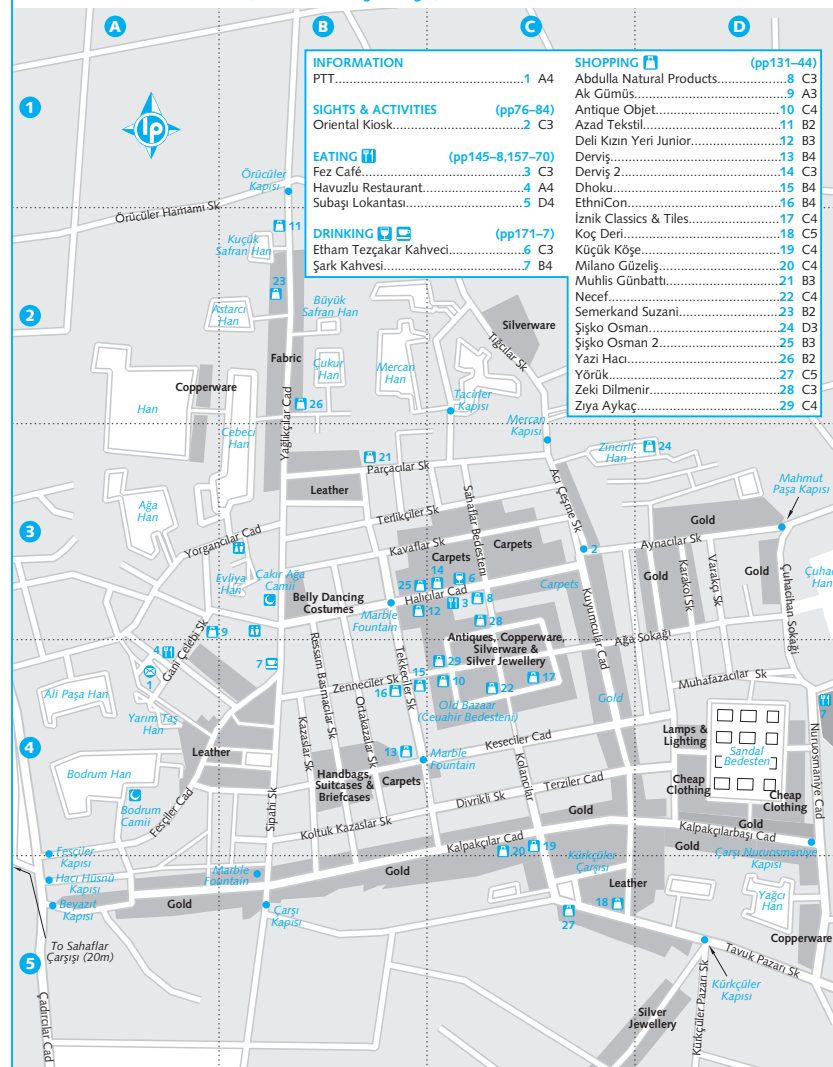
Before you visit this, the most famous souq in the world, make sure you prepare yourself properly. First, make sure you're in a good mood and ready to swap friendly banter with the hundreds of shopkeepers who will attempt to lure you into their establishments. There's no use getting tetchy with the touts here – this is their turf and it would be delusional of you to think that you're anything more than putty in their hands (and liras in their cash registers). Second, allow enough time to look into every nook and cranny, drink innumerable cups of tea, compare price after price and try your hand at the art of bargaining. Shopkeepers have been doing this here for centuries and, frankly, it would be unbecoming for you to do any less. (For tips on bargaining, see [p132](#).) And third: never, ever forget your baggage allowance. There's nothing worse than that sinking feeling at the

airport check-in counter when you realise that your Grand Bazaar-induced shopping frenzy means that the dreaded term 'excess baggage' is about to become a reality and test your already sorely abused credit card to its limits.

The bazaar is the heart of the city in much more than a geographical sense and has been so for centuries. With over 4000 shops and several kilometres of lanes, as well as mosques, banks, police stations, restaurants and workshops, it's a covered city all of its own. Though 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 where import/export businesses flourish. And it also functions as the nucleus of a large commercial neighbourhood, with most of the surrounding streets (Mahmutpaşa Yokuşu is a good example) catering to every conceivable local shopping need.

Starting from a small masonry *bedesten* (warehouse) built in the time of Mehmet

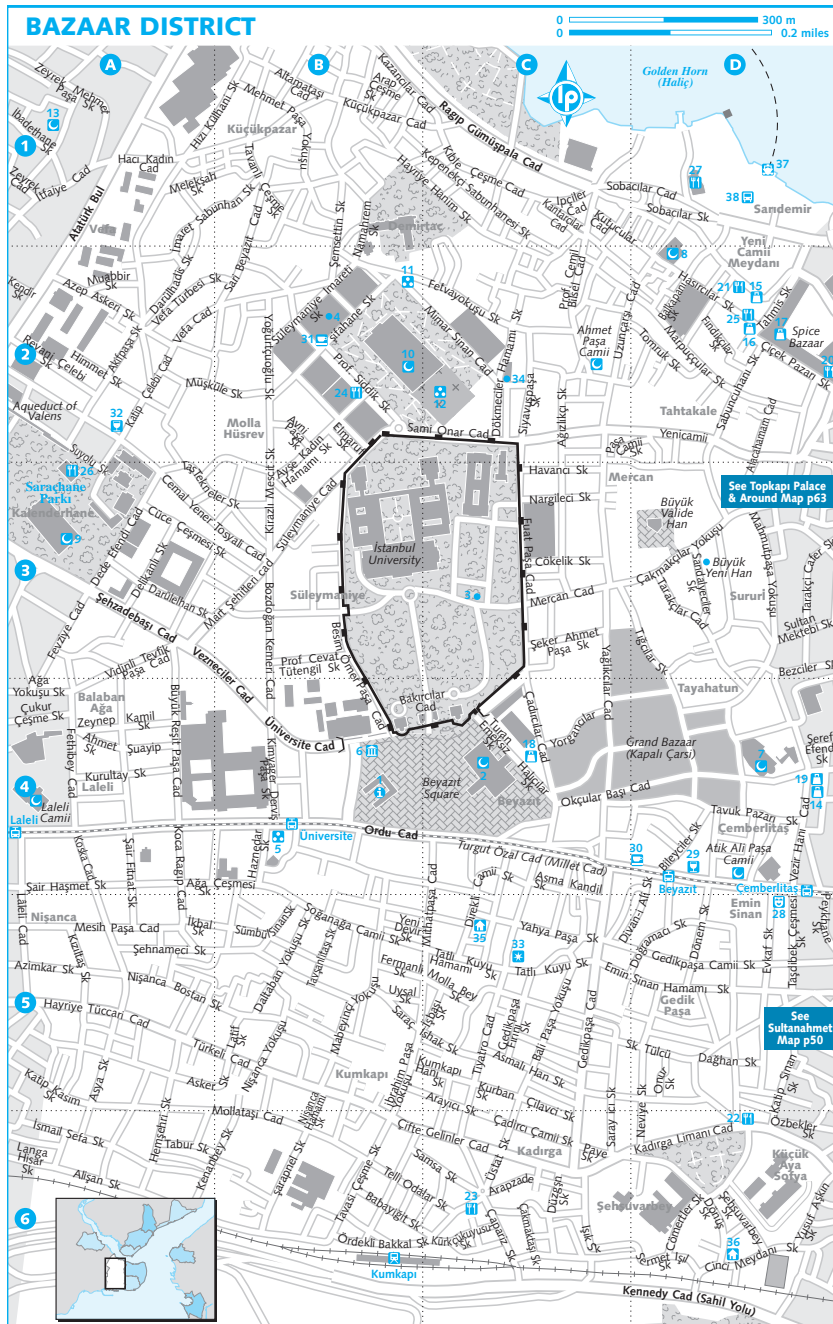
## GRAND BAZAAR (KAPALI ÇARŞI)



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 mini-city could be closed up tight at the end of the business day. Street names refer to trades and crafts: Kuyumcular Caddesi (Jewellers St) and İnciciler

Sokağı (Pearl Merchants' St) are two that you're bound to walk down. Large sections of the bazaar have been destroyed by fire and earthquake a number of times in its history (most recently in 1954), but have always been rebuilt.

Just inside the Nuruosmaniye Kapısı (doorway), on the southeast corner of the market, you'll find a glittering street filled with the stores of gold merchants. This is



## BAZAAR DISTRICT

### INFORMATION

Tourist Information Office.....1 B4

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Beyazıt Camii.....2 C4  
 Beyazıt Tower.....3 C3  
 Darüzziyafe (Former Soup Kitchen).....4 B2  
 Forum of Theodosius Columns.....5 B4  
 Museum of Turkish Calligraphic Art.....6 B4  
 Nuruosmaniye Camii.....7 D4  
 Rüstem Paşa Camii.....8 D2  
 Şehzade Mehmet Camii.....9 A3  
 Süleymaniye Camii.....10 B2  
 Tomb of Mimar Sinan.....11 B2  
 Tombs of Süleyman the Magnificent & Roxelana.....12 C2  
 Zeyrek Camii.....13 A1

### SHOPPING

Design Zone.....14 D4

Ekincioğlu Toys & Gifts.....15 D2

Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi Mahdumları.....16 D2  
 Mehmet Kalmaz Baharatçı.....17 D2  
 Sahafılar Çarşısı.....18 C4  
 Sofa.....19 D4

### EATING

Bab-ı Hayat.....20 D2  
 Darüzziyafe Restaurant.....(see 4)  
 Hamdi Et Lokantası.....21 D2  
 İmren Lokantası.....22 D6  
 Kör Agop Restaurant.....23 C6  
 Meshur Kuru Fasülyeci.....24 B2  
 Nimla Pastrımcı.....25 D2  
 Şehzade Mehmed Sofrası.....26 A3  
 Zinhan Kebap House at Storks.....27 D1

### ARTS

Dance of Colours.....28 D5

**DRINKING** (pp171-7)

Balkan Türkleri Dayanışma ve Kültür Derneği.....29 D4  
 Erenler Çay Bahçesi.....30 D4  
 Lale Bahçesi.....31 B2  
 Vefa Bozacısı.....32 A2

### NIGHTLIFE

(pp179-84)

Oriont House.....33 C5

### SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

(pp191-6)

Süleymaniye Hamamı.....34 C2

### SLEEPING

(pp197-209)

Hotel Niles.....35 C5

Hotel Türkuaş.....36 C6

### TRANSPORT

(pp230-5)

Golden Horn (Haliç) Ferries.....37 D1

Rüstempaşa/Eminönü Bus Stand.....38 D1

called **Kalpakistanbaşı Caddesi** and it's the closest thing the bazaar has to a main street. Most of the bazaar is on your right (north) in the crazy maze of tiny streets and alleys. You'll inevitably get lost when exploring them, but hey, that's part of the fun!

Make sure you pop into the **Santal Bedesten** off Kalpakçılarbaşı Caddesi. This rectangular hall with a domed roof supported by 12 large pillars is also called the Yeni Bedesten (New Warehouse), as it was built after Mehmet's central *bedesten*, some time in the 17th century.

The **Old Bazaar**, also known as Cevahir Bedesteni (Jewellery Warehouse), is at the centre of the market. Thought to be the first building Mehmet the Conqueror built, its structure is similar to the Santal Bedesten. Inside, you'll find innumerable small shops selling quality jewellery, silver, ceramics and antiques.

When wandering, seek out north-south Sipahi Caddesi and its famous **Şark Kahvesi** (p174), a worn-out but charming relic of Old İstanbul whose walls feature quirky images of dervishes on flying carpets. This is a great place to linger over a game of backgammon and a few glasses of tea. Other places that make good coffee and tea stops in the bazaar are the pricey **Fez Café** and the cheaper **Etham Tezçakar Kahveci** (p174), both on atmospheric Halıcılar Caddesi near the Old Bazaar.

In the bazaar itself, the best place for a meal is **Havuzlu Restaurant** (p162), located in a *han* near the PTT in Gani Çelebi Sokak; two nearby lokantas – **Subaşı Lokantası** (p162) and **Sefa Restaurant** (p161) – are also popular with the bazaar's shopkeepers.

Near the junction of Halıcılar Caddesi and Kuyumcular Caddesi you'll find the crooked **Oriental Kiosk**, which was built as a coffee house and now functions as a jewellery shop. North from here, up Acı Çeşme Sokak, is the gorgeous pink **Zincirli Han**, home to one of the bazaar's most famous carpet dealers, **Şişko Osman** (p139).

Bibliophiles will want to head towards **Sahafılar Çarşısı** (Old Book Bazaar; Map p78), which is found in a shady little courtyard west of the bazaar at the end of Kalpakçılarbaşı Caddesi. The book bazaar dates from Byzantine times. Today, many of the booksellers are members of a dervish order called the Halveti after its founder, Hazreti Mehmet Nureddin-i Cerrahi-i Halveti. They sell wares both new and old, and though it's unlikely you'll uncover any underpriced antique treasures, you'll certainly be able to find old engravings, a curiosity or two, phrasebooks and books on İstanbul and Turkish culture in several languages.

To check out what to buy in the bazaar and where to buy it, refer to p133. One of the most intriguing aspects of a visit to the bazaar is noticing its juxtaposition of tourist tat and precious objects, proving the point that the place really does cater to every possible shopping desire!

## NURUOSMANIYE CAMİİ Map p78

Light of Osman Mosque; Vezir Hanı Caddesi;

☞ Beyazıt

Facing Nuruosmaniye Kapısı, one of several doorways into the Grand Bazaar, this mosque was built in Ottoman baroque

style between 1748 and 1755. Construction was started by Mahmut I and finished by his successor Osman III. Though meant to exhibit the sultans' 'modern' taste, the baroque building has very strong echoes of Aya Sofya, specifically the broad, lofty dome, colonnaded mezzanine galleries, windows topped with Roman arches and the broad band of calligraphy around the interior. Despite its prominent position on the busy pedestrian route from Cağaloğlu Square and Nuruosmaniye Caddesi to the bazaar, it is surprisingly peaceful and contemplative inside.

## BEYAZIT SQUARE & İSTANBUL UNIVERSITY Map p78

### ☞ Beyazit

Beyazit Square is officially called Hürriyet Meydanı (Freedom Square), though everyone knows it simply as Beyazit. Under the rule of the Byzantines it was called the Forum of Theodosius. Sections of the forum's columns decorated with stylised oak-knot designs were dug up from the square during the 1950s and can be seen on the other side of Yeniçeriler Caddesi. Today the square is home to street vendors, students from İstanbul University and plenty of pigeons, as well as a few policemen who like to keep an eye on student activities.

The square is backed by the impressive portal of the University. After the Conquest, Mehmet the Conqueror built his first palace here, a wooden structure called the Eski Sarayı (Old Seraglio). After Topkapı was built the Eski Sarayı became home to women when they were pensioned out of the main palace – this is where *valide sultans* came when their sultan sons died and they lost their powerful position as head of the harem. The original building was demolished in the 19th century to make way

for a grandiose Ministry of War complex designed by Auguste Bourgeois; this now houses the university. The stone tower, visible from most of Old İstanbul, was built as a lookout for fires. Both the university and tower are off limits to travellers.

### BEYAZIT CAMİİ Map p78

Mosque of Sultan Beyazit II; ☎ 212-519 3644;

Yeniçeriler Caddesi; ☞ Beyazit

Dating from 1501 to 1506, this was the second imperial mosque to be built in the city after Mehmet the Conqueror's **Fatih Camii** (p95), and was the prototype for other imperial mosques. In effect, it is the link between **Aya Sofya** (p49), which obviously inspired its design, and the great mosques such as **Süleymaniye** (below), which are realisations of Aya Sofya's design fully adapted to Muslim worship.

Of particular note is the mosque's exceptional use of fine stone: marble, porphyry, verd antique and rare granite. The mihrab is simple, except for the rich stone columns framing it, and the courtyard, with its 24 small domes and central fountain, is particularly pretty.

Some of the other buildings of Beyazit's *küllüye* (mosque complex) have been well utilised. The soup kitchen has been turned into a library, while the *medrese* is now the **Museum of Turkish Calligraphic Art** (below). Unfortunately the once-splendid hamam is still waiting to be restored. Beyazit's *türbe* is behind the mosque.

### MUSEUM OF TURKISH CALLIGRAPHIC ART Map p78

Türk Vakıf Hat Sanatları Müzesi; ☎ 212-527 5851; Hürriyet Meydanı, Beyazit; admission YTL3; ☕ 9am-4pm Tue-Sat; ☞ Beyazit

Housed in a small building at the western side of Beyazit Square, this museum contains wall hangings and manuscripts illustrating mainly cursive calligraphic styles, many dating from the 13th century. There are also some examples of calligraphy on stone, tile and glass. The building, once the *medrese* of Beyazit Camii, is a series of rooms surrounding a leafy courtyard.

### SÜLEYMANIYE CAMİİ Map p78

Mosque of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent; ☎ 212-514 0139; Prof Sıddık Sami Onar Caddesi; donation requested; ☕ tombs 9.30am-5.30pm; ☞ Beyazit

The Süleymaniye crowns one of the seven hills, and dominates the Golden Horn, providing a landmark for the entire city. It was commissioned by the greatest, richest and most powerful of Ottoman sultans, Süleyman I (r 1520–66), known as 'The Magnificent', and was the fourth imperial mosque built in İstanbul, following the Fatih, Beyazit and Selim I complexes.

Though it's not the largest of the Ottoman mosques, the Süleymaniye is certainly the grandest. It was designed by Mimar Sinan, the most famous and talented of all imperial architects. Though 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 that he would be best remembered for. His tomb is just outside the mosque's walled garden, next to the *medrese* building.

The mosque was built between 1550 and 1557; records show that 3523 craftspeople worked on its construction. Though it's seen some hard times, being damaged by fire in 1660 and having its wonderful columns covered by cement and oil paint at some point after this, a restoration in 1956 and decades of subsequent care mean that it's in great shape these days. It's also one of the most popular mosques in the city, with worshippers rivalling the Blue Mosque in number.

The mosque's setting and plan are particularly pleasing, with well-tended gardens and a three-sided forecourt surrounded by a wall with grilled windows and featuring a central domed ablutions fountain. Its four minarets with their beautiful balconies are said to represent the fact that Süleyman was the fourth of the Osmani sultans to rule the city.

Inside, the mosque is breathtaking in its size and pleasing in its simplicity. It is also remarkably light. Sinan's design is particularly ingenious due to the fact that the buttresses used to support the four columns are incorporated into the walls of the building, masked by galleries with arcades of columns running between the buttresses. Put simply, the architect, ever challenged by the technical accomplishments of Aya Sofya, took the floor plan of that church and here perfected its adaptation to the requirements of Muslim worship.

There is little interior decoration other than some very fine İznik tiles in the

mihrab, gorgeous stained-glass windows done by one Ibrahim the Drunkard, and four massive columns – one from Baalbek in modern-day Lebanon, one from Alexandria and two from Byzantine palaces in İstanbul. The painted arabesques on the dome are 19th-century additions, recently renewed. If you visit when the stairs to the gallery on the northeast side (ie facing the Golden Horn) are open, make sure you go upstairs and out to the balcony. The views from this vantage point are among the best in the city.

The *küllüye* of the Süleymaniye, which is outside the walled garden, is particularly elaborate, with the full complement of public services: soup kitchen, hostel, hospital etc. Today the soup kitchen, with its charming garden courtyard, houses the **Dârüzzıyafe Restaurant**, which is a lovely place to enjoy a *çay* (tea). **Lale Bahçesi** (p174), located in a sunken courtyard next to Dârüzzıyafe, is an atmospheric venue for *çay* and nargileh. Both it and the nearby **Meshur Kuru Fasülyeci** (p162), are extremely popular with students and locals. Those in need of an energy boost could make the short trip to **Vefa Bozacısı** (p174), the most famous place in the city to sample *boza*, the İstanbul tonic drink made with fermented grain.

The mosque's **hamam** (p193) still functions.

Near the southeast wall of the mosque is the cemetery, with the **tombs** of Süleyman and his wife Haseki Hürrem Sultan (Roxelana). The tilework in both is superb. In Süleyman's tomb, little jewel-like lights in the dome are surrogate stars. In Hürrem's tomb, the many tile panels of flowers and the delicate stained glass produce a serene effect.

### ŞEHZADE MEHMET CAMİİ Map p78

Mosque of the Prince; Şehzadebaşı Caddesi; ☞ Laleli

Süleyman the Magnificent built this mosque between 1543 and 1548 as a memorial to his son, Mehmet, who died of smallpox in 1543 at the age of 22. It was the first important mosque to be designed by Mimar Sinan. Although not one of his best works, it has two beautiful minarets and attractive exterior decoration. Among the many important people buried in tile-encrusted **tombs** here are Prince Mehmet, his brothers and sisters, and Süleyman's grand viziers, Rüstem Paşa and Ibrahim Paşa. After you've visited the mosque, make

# top picks

IT'S FREE

- Grand Bazaar (p76)
- Spice Bazaar (p82)
- Hippodrome (p56)
- Galata Bridge (p74)
- Florence Nightingale Museum (p124)
- All mosques

sure you stop for a tea or lunch at [Şehzade Mehmed Sofrası](#) (p162), housed in one of the *külliy*e buildings behind the mosque.

### **ZEYREK CAMII** Map p78

Church of the Pantocrator; İbadethane Sokak; ☞ Laleli

Zeyrek Camii was originally part of an important Byzantine sanctuary comprising two churches, a chapel and a monastery. The monastery is long gone and the northernmost church is derelict, but the southern church still has some features intact, including a magnificent marble floor. Empress Eirene had the church built before her death in 1124 (she features in a mosaic at Aya Sofya with Emperor John II Comnenus). The church and the attached chapel, built by John II, now function as a mosque. Outside prayer times a caretaker is usually available to show visitors around and will gratefully accept a donation in return. Ask him to pull back the carpet to reveal part of the splendid mosaic floor.

### **RÜSTEM PAŞA CAMII** Map p78

Mosque of Rüstem Paşa; ☎ 212-526 7350; Hasırılar Caddesi; ☞ Eminönü

Plonked in the middle of the busy Tahtakale district, this little-visited mosque is a gem. Built in 1560 by Sinan for Rüstem Paşa, son-in-law and grand vizier of Süleyman the Magnificent, it is a showpiece of the best Ottoman architecture and tilework, albeit on a small scale. It is thought to have been the prototype for Sinan's greatest work, the Selimiye in Edirne.

At the top of the entry steps there's a terrace and the mosque's colonnaded porch. You'll notice at once the panels of İznik faience 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 influence – 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-İkbal* (the 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 the 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. There's a set of access stairs on Hasırılar Caddesi and another on the small street that runs right (north) off Hasırılar Caddesi to the Golden Horn.

### **SPICE BAZAAR** Map p78

Mısır Çarşısı, Egyptian Market; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat; ☞ Eminönü

Need a herbal love potion or natural Turkish Viagra? This is the place to find them, although we wouldn't vouch for the efficacy of either! As well as *baharat* (spices), nuts, honey in the comb and olive oil soaps, the bustling spice bazaar sells truckloads of *incir* (figs), *lokum* (Turkish delight) and *pestil* (fruit pressed into sheets and dried). The number of shops selling tourist trinkets increases annually, yet this remains a great place to stock up on edible souvenirs, share a few jokes with the vendors and marvel at the well-preserved building. It's also home to one of the city's oldest restaurants, [Pandeli](#), and to its attractive new competitor [Bab-i Hayat](#) (p162).

The market was constructed in the 1660s as part of the [Yeni Camii complex](#) (p73); the rent from the shops supports the upkeep of the mosque and its charitable activities, which include a school, baths, hospital and public fountains. It was called the Egyptian Market because it is thought that it was initially endowed with taxes levied on goods imported from Egypt.

Between the market and the Yeni Camii is the city's major outdoor market for flowers, plants, seeds and songbirds. There's a toilet (*tuvalet*) down a flight of stairs, subject to a small fee.

On the west side of the market there are outdoor produce stalls selling fresh foodstuff from all over Anatolia. Also here is the most famous coffee supplier in Istanbul, [Kurukahveci Mehmet Efendi Mahdumları](#) (p137), established over 100 years ago.

### **AQUEDUCT OF VALENS** Map p78

Bozdoğan Kemer; ☞ Aksaray

Rising majestically over the traffic on busy Atatürk Bulvarı, this limestone structure is

one of the city's most distinctive landmarks. Visitors often gasp in amazement on seeing it for the first time (amazement often turns into consternation when they notice excited fans from the nearby Vefa football stadium doing perilous victory dances waving their team's colours from its dizzy heights).

We don't know for sure that the aqueduct was constructed by the Emperor Valens (r 364–78), but we do know that it has been repaired a number of times, the first in 1019 and the last in the late 1980s. It's thought that the aqueduct carried water over this valley to a cistern at Beyazıt Square before finally ending up at the Great Byzantine Palace. After the Conquest it supplied the Eski (Old) and Topkapı Palaces with water.

## **BAZAAR DISTRICT WALK**

### **Walking Tour**

**1 Nuruosmaniye Camii** This Ottoman baroque [mosque](#) (p79) stands at the Nuruosmaniye Gate, one of the main entrances to the Grand Bazaar. It's always busy at prayer time, but is

wonderfully peaceful at other times. The gold emblem above the gateway into the bazaar is the Ottoman armorial emblem with the sultan's monogram.

**2 Grand Bazaar** When Mehmet the Conqueror laid the foundation stone for this [bazaar](#) (p76), he set off a craze for shopping malls that İstanbul has cultivated ever since. His original *bedesten* (covered market), now an antiques and curios hall, spread and engulfed surrounding *hans* (caravansaries), creating the chaotic shopping crush you see today.

**3 Sahafılar Çarşısı** This rather picturesque [book bazaar](#) (p76) dates from Byzantine times. Today, many of the booksellers are members of a dervish order called the Halveti

### **WALK FACTS**

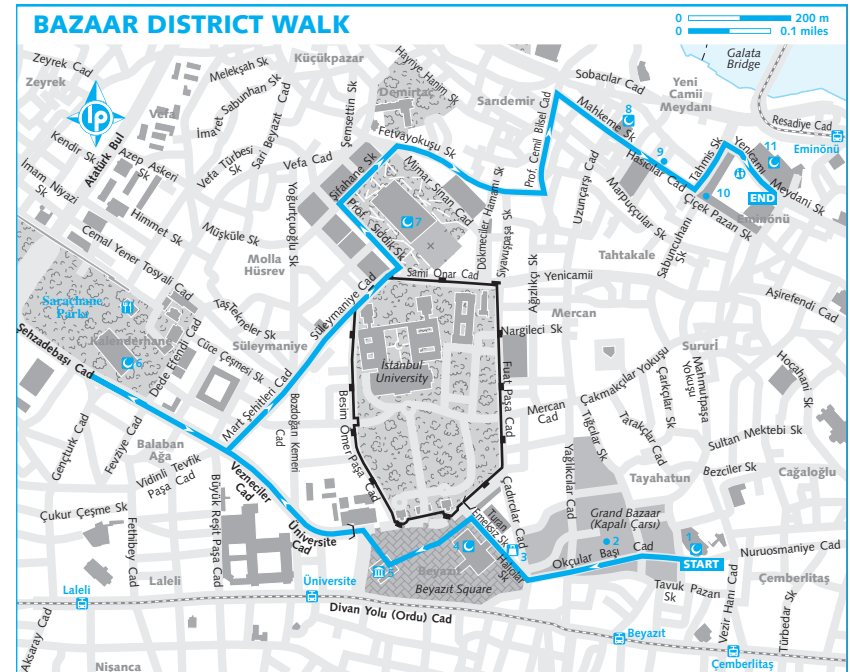
Start Nuruosmaniye Camii

End Yeni Camii

Distance 4km

Duration Five hours

Fuel stop Şehzade Mehmed Sofrası (p162), in the grounds of Şehzade Mehmet Mosque



after its founder, Hazreti Mehmet Nureddin-i Cerrahi-i Halveti.

**4 Beyazıt Camii** The city's second imperial mosque (p80), this prominent landmark has recently had a spit-n-polish job, and is looking mighty handsome as a result. Make sure you wander around its interior courtyard, with its 24 small domes and central fountain.

#### 5 Museum of Turkish Calligraphic Art

You will have seen reproductions of Ottoman calligraphy plastered over T-shirts, postcards and ceramics in the city's souvenir shops, but this is the place (p80) to admire the real thing, executed on manuscripts, wall hangings, glass, stone and tile and dating from as early as the 13th century.

**6 Şehzade Mehmet Camii** This quiet and attractive mosque (p81) has minarets whose pointed perfection are unrivalled in the city. Set in beautifully maintained gardens featuring a beautiful restaurant/çay bahçesi (p162), it was built by Süleyman the Magnificent as a memorial for his son Mehmet, who died young.

**7 Süleymaniye Camii** The Süleymaniye (p80) was the crowing glory of Sinan's prodigious architectural output and is widely acknowledged to be the most important Ottoman building in İstanbul. Its sprawling külliye (outbuildings) include a soup kitchen, hos-

tel, hospital, hamam and medrese. Simply spectacular.

**8 Rüstem Paşa Camii** This diminutive mosque (p82) is the most charming in the city. Nestled amongst the confusion and chaos of the Tahtakale shopping district, its walls are encrusted with exquisite turquoise-coloured İznik tiles and its graceful colonnaded terrace provides a true urban haven.

**9 Hasircilar Caddesi** If you're after freshly ground coffee, aromatic spices, dried figs, nuts or tea, this is where you should come. The tourists visit the Spice Bazaar, but this street is one where you'll find the locals buying up big.

**10 Spice Bazaar** The vividly coloured pyramids of spices and ornate displays of jewel-like lokum provide eye candy for the thousands of tourists who tramp through this Ottoman marketplace (p82) every day. And though the sultan's head chef no longer shops here, there's still an undeniably Ottoman air about the place.

**11 Yeni Camii** It's over 400 years old, but that doesn't stop the locals referring to this building as the 'New Mosque' (p73). A commanding location overlooking the Eminönü docks means that this is one of the most loved and familiar sights of the city.

## WESTERN DISTRICTS

Eating p163

This part of the city is one of the least visited by visitors and that's a shame, because it's one of the most interesting. Those travellers interested in veering off the tourist track and exploring will find that spending a day here is extremely rewarding.

As İstanbul grew over the centuries, its boundaries moved westward and a series of successive city walls were put up to protect the city. In these western suburbs, populations of two major ethnic groups settled – the Jews in Balat and the Greeks in Fener. Today, their synagogues and churches are among the most interesting sights to visit in the neighbourhood – along with one of the most splendid examples of Byzantine religious art in the world, the Chora Church (Kariye Müzesi; below).

Though remnants of the Western Districts' diverse populations still live around here, most of the current inhabitants are from the east of Turkey and are more conservative than the rest of the city's population. You'll notice, for instance, that headscarves are *de rigueur* here, with some women even wearing chadors. These areas are also conspicuously less affluent than the suburbs around Beyoğlu, the Bosphorus or even Sultanahmet.

The neighbourhood is bounded by the Golden Horn to the east and follows this waterway as far north as Edirnekapi. The major through-roads are Mürsel Paşa Caddesi (at various points also called Abdülezel Paşa Caddesi and Sadrazam Ali Paşa Caddesi), which follows the shore of the Golden Horn, and Fevzi Paşa Caddesi (the continuation of Macar Kardeşler and Şehzadebaşı Caddesi), which runs from Beyazıt and punches through the walls at Edirnekapi. Major transport is provided by bus along Fevzi Paşa Caddesi and by the Eminönü–Eyüp ferry along the Golden Horn.

#### CHORA CHURCH Map p96

Kariye Müzesi; ☎ 212-631 9241; Kariye Camii Sokak, Edirnekapi; admission YTL10; 🕒 9am-6.30pm Thu-Tue; 📍 Edirnekapi

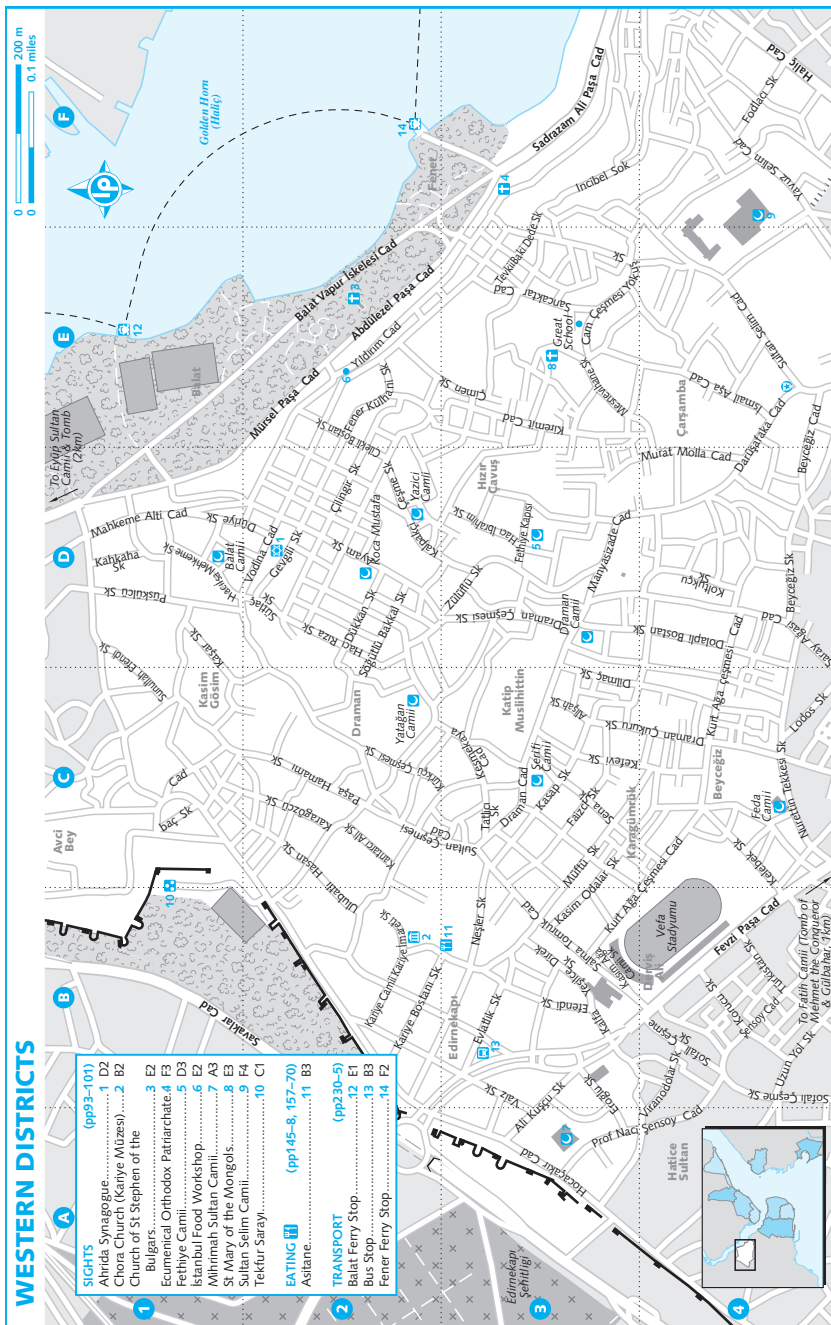
Chora literally means 'country', and when it was built Chora Church, or the Church of the Holy Saviour Outside the Walls, was indeed outside the city walls built by Constantine the Great. However, within a century it was engulfed by Byzantine urban sprawl and enclosed within a new set of walls built by Emperor Theodosius II.

It was not only the environs of the church that changed over the years. For four centuries the building served as a mosque, Kariye Camii, but it's now a museum. And what you see today is not the original church-outside-the-walls. Rather, this one was built in the late 11th century, with reworking in the succeeding centuries. Virtually all of the interior decoration – the famous mosaics and the less-renowned but equally striking frescoes – dates from 1312 and was funded by Theodore Metochites, a man of letters who was auditor of the Treasury under Andronikos II (between 1282 and 1328). One of the museum's most wonderful mosaics (map item 48), 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 stunning. See the plan on p96. Look out for the Khalke Jesus (map item 33), 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 stunning depiction of Jesus and his ancestors (the Genealogy of Christ; map item 27). On the narthex's left dome is a serenely beautiful mosaic of Mary and the Child Jesus surrounded by her ancestors (map item 34).

In the nave are three mosaics: of Christ (map item 50c), of Mary and the child Jesus (map item 50b) and of the Dormition (Assumption; map item 50a) of the Blessed Virgin – turn around to see this, 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 deal with the themes of death and resurrection, depicting scenes taken from the Old Testament. The striking painting in the apse known as the *Anastasis* (map item 51) shows a powerful Christ raising Adam and Eve out of their sarcophagi, with saints and kings in attendance. The gates of



## BARBARA NADEL'S İSTANBUL

Çetin İkmekçi is a typical Turkish male. He smokes like a chimney, is unfailingly courteous to strangers and dotes on his children. Unlike the rest of his compatriots he also happens to be an Inspector in the Istanbul Police Department, a devotee of the brandy bottle and the possessor of special powers of divination passed down from his Albanian mother, who was known in her local neighbourhood of Scutari as being a witch. His sexy sidekick, Mehmet Süleyman, comes from a privileged Ottoman background, is as sensitive and intelligent as he is attractive, but is strangely unhappy despite possessing these palpable assets. Together, they form a successful but unorthodox crime-solving team gracing the pages of Barbara Nadel's wonderful series of İkmekçi crime novels.

Nadel is a British writer who knows Istanbul well and loves it with a passion. Her 10 İkmekçi novels to date are all set in the city and conjure up its neighbourhoods with extraordinary colour and detail. In *Belshazzar's Daughter*, the first of the series, most of the action is in Balat and Beyoğlu; in *A Chemical Prison* (Nadel's favourite of all of the books) it's in the area around Topkapı Palace; and in *Pretty Dead Things*, her most recent novel, part of the action is in Karaköy. The other titles in the series – *Arabesk*, *Deep Waters*, *Harem*, *Dance With Death* and *A Passion for Killing* – all lovingly evoke different areas of the city. The only time Nadel has allowed İkmekçi to stray from Istanbul was in 2005's *Deadly Web*, where he investigates a cold case in Cappadocia.

There is one part of the city that Nadel finds particularly fascinating – the old Jewish quarter of Balat. It features in both *Belshazzar's Daughter* and *Petrified*, and the denouement in *Pretty Dead Things* occurs here also. In the books, İkmekçi's much-loved daughter and ever-present character, Hulya, marries a Jewish friend of the family and moves to Balat, so the suburb is bound to stay centre stage in the future, too. When walking around the suburb, scenes from *Petrified* are immediately called to mind. The Church of St Stephen of the Bulgars (p98), where Russian villain Valery Rostov stages a fake drug drop to humiliate the police; the residential quarter around the Church of St Mary of the Mongols (p97), where artist Melih Akdeniz and his family live; the junkyard near the rear of the Hotel Daphnis where Eren Akdeniz gives the police the slip – all of these sites are easy to identify and testify to Nadel's extensive on-the-ground research in the neighbourhood.

hell are shown under Christ's feet. Less majestic but no less beautiful are the frescoes (map item 65) adorning the dome, which show Mary and 12 attendant angels.

Though no one knows for certain, it is thought that the frescoes were painted by the same masters who created the mosaics. Theirs is an extraordinary accomplishment, as the paintings, with their sophisticated use of perspective and exquisitely portrayed facial expressions, rival those painted by the Italian master Giotto, the painter who more than any other ushered in the Italian Renaissance.

Between 1948 and 1959 the decoration was carefully restored under the auspices of the Byzantine Society of America. Plaster and whitewash covering the mosaics and frescoes was removed and the works were cleaned. Unfortunately, the mosaics seem to be in need of further work today, with damp appearing under the Perspex covers on some of the outer narthex's examples.

This is one of the city's best museums and deserves an extended visit. On leaving, we highly recommend sampling the delectable Ottoman menu at the *Asitane restaurant* (p163), which is under the next-door Kariye Oteli.

Finally, a plea: despite signs clearly prohibiting the use of flashes in the museum,

many visitors wilfully ignore this rule. Please don't be one of them.

### FATİH CAMİİ off Map p94

Mosque of the Conqueror; Fevzi Paşa Caddesi; ☞ tombs 9.30am–4.30pm; 🚗 Fatih

The Fatih was the first great imperial mosque built in Istanbul following the Conquest. For its location Mehmet the Conqueror chose the hilltop site of the ruined Church of the Apostles, burial place of Constantine and other Byzantine emperors. The mosque complex, finished in 1470, was enormous; set in extensive grounds, it included in its *külliye* 15 charitable establishments such as religious schools, a hospice for travellers and a caravanserai. Unfortunately, the mosque you see today is not the one Mehmet built. The original stood for nearly 300 years before toppling in an earthquake in 1766. Though rebuilt, it was destroyed by fire in 1782. The present mosque dates from the reign of Abdül Hamid I and is on a completely different plan. Though traces of Mehmet's mosque remain – the courtyard and its main entrance portal – the interior of the Fatih, with its ugly drinking fountain, is relatively unimpressive.

THIS MAP  
NOT AVAILABLE  
IN PICK & MIX

Directly behind the mosque are the tombs of Mehmet the Conqueror and his wife Gülbahar. Confusingly, Mehmet isn't buried here, but rather under the *mimber* in the mosque. Muslims consider Mehmet's tomb a very holy site. It's inevitably filled with worshippers.

The grassed outer courtyard of the mosque is a favourite place for locals to congregate and for families to picnic, especially on Sunday. On Wednesday both the courtyard and the surrounding streets host the **Fatih Pazarı**, a weekly market selling fresh produce and clothing.

### MİHRİMAH SULTAN CAMİİ Map p94

**Ali Kuşçu Sokak, Edirnekapi**; 🚶 Edirnekapi  
The great Sinan put his stamp on the entire city and this mosque, constructed in the 1560s next to the Edirnekapi section of Theodosius' great wall, is one of his best works. Commissioned by Süleyman the Magnificent's favourite daughter, Mihrimah, it has recently been restored. The mosque is noted for its delicate stained-glass windows and its large interior space, made particularly light by its 19 windows in each arched tympanum. The mosque occupies

the highest point in the city and its dome and one slender minaret are major adornments to the city skyline; they are particularly prominent on the road from Edirne.

### TEKFUR SARAYI Map p94

**Palace of the Sovereign, Palace of Constantine Porphyrogenitus; Hocaçakır Caddesi**; 🚶 Edirnekapi  
Sacred buildings often endure because they continue to be used, even though they may be converted for use in another religion. Put simply, there's something a bit iffy about razing a place of worship, and not too many people want to do it. No such squeamishness surrounds secular buildings such as palaces, though, and history shows that these are often torn down and rebuilt to cater to the tastes and needs of different generations. İstanbul is no different – the Byzantine palaces that once crowded Sultanahmet Square are all gone, so is the great Palace of Blachernae, which was also in this neighbourhood. Only the Tekfur Sarayı remains.

Though the building is only a shell these days, it is remarkably preserved considering its great age. Built in the late 13th or early 14th century and located close to the end of Theodosius' wall, it was a large three-

MOSAICS		Frescoes	
The voyage of the Virgin to Bethlehem and the dream of Joseph.....1	The healing by Jesus of leprosy man.....26b	Mary and the child Jesus.....50b	Jesus in a standing posture, holding the bible in his hand.....50c
The census held for the enrolment for taxation and registration of Mary and Joseph in the presence of Cyrenius, Governor of Syria.....2	The healing by Jesus of a woman asking for the restoration of her health.....27	The church fathers.....51	The raising (resurrection) of the widow's son.....53
Jesus going with Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem.....3	The healing by Jesus of the mother-in-law of St Peter.....29	The healing of the daughter of Jairus.....54	The Virgin Elousa.....55
Remains of mosaics – Jesus amongst the doctors in the temple.....4	The healing by Jesus of a deaf person.....30	The Last Judgment.....56	Abraham and the beggar Lazzarus on his lap.....57
St Trachos.....5a	Dispersion of good health by Jesus to the people.....31	St. George.....58	Rich man burning in Hell's fire.....59
St Andronikus.....5b	The healing by Jesus of two blind men.....32	Those entering Heaven and the Angel Seraphim with the semi-nude good thief.....60	Depiction of Andronikus II and his family, and the inscription and depiction above of Makarios Tornikes and his wife Eugenia.....61
The birth of Jesus.....6	The Virgin and the child Jesus.....33	The Bearing of the Ark of the Covenant.....62	St. Demetrius.....63
The return of the Virgin Mary with Jesus.....7	Joachim in the mountains praying to have a child.....35	St. Theodore Tiro.....64	Mary and child Jesus with the twelve attending angels.....65
The attempts of Satan to deceive Jesus.....8	No mosaics left.....36	Four Gospel Writers (Hymnographers): St. Cosmos.....66	Four Gospel Writers (Hymnographers): St. John of Damascus.....67
St Georgios.....9a	The breaking of the good news of the birth of Jesus to Mary – The Annunciation.....37	Four Gospel Writers (Hymnographers): St. Theophanes.....68	Four Gospel Writers (Hymnographers): St. Joseph.....69
St Demetrius.....9b	The chief priest Zachariah judging the Virgin.....38	St. Theodore Stratelates.....70	St. Theodore Stratelates.....71
Jesus and the inscription 'the dwelling-place of the living'.....10	Mary and Joseph bidding each other farewell.....39	King Solomon and the Israelites.....71	Placement into the Temple of The Ark of the Covenant.....72
The prayer of the Virgin and the attendant angels.....11	The breaking of the good news of the birth of Mary to Anne.....40	The combat of an angel with the Asurians in the outskirts of Jerusalem.....73	St. Procopios, St. Sabas Stratelates.....74
The wedding at Cana and the miracles.....12	The meeting of Anne and Joachim.....41a	Moses in the bushes.....75	Jacob's ladder and the angels.....76
Depiction of the saints.....13a	Joseph bringing the Virgin into his house.....41b	Aaron and his sons carrying votive offerings, in front of the altar.....77	St. Samonas and Guiras.....78
Depiction of the saints.....13b	Mary in the arms of Anne and Joachim, and the blessing by the priests.....42		
The Magi on their way to Jerusalem riding on horseback and the three Magi in audience with King Herod.....14	Giving of the stick with young shoots, indicating Joseph as Mary's fiancé.....43		
Elizabeth and John the Baptist running away from a pursuing soldier.....15	The birth of the Virgin Mary.....44		
Remains of mosaics.....16	The first seven steps of the Virgin, and below, St Peter.....45a		
Depiction of the saints.....17a	The prayer of the chief priest Zachariah in front of the twelve sticks.....45b		
Depiction of the saints.....17b	The presentation of Mary (age three) to the temple by her parents.....46		
The scene of King Herod's investigation and a guard standing.....18	The Virgin taking the skeins of wool to weave the veil for the temple.....47		
The mourning mothers.....19	Theodore Metochites presenting a small model of the church to Jesus.....48		
No mosaics left.....20	The feeding of the Virgin by an angel, and below, St Peter.....49a		
A decorative medallion.....21	Remains of mosaics – Directives given to the Virgin at the temple.....49b		
The meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well.....22	The death of the Virgin.....50a		
The healing of a paralysed person by Jesus.....23			
King Herod giving the order for the massacre of the innocents and the execution thereof.....24			
Remains of mosaics.....25			
The healing by Jesus of a young man with an injured arm.....26a			

storeyed palace that may have been an annex of the Palace of Blachernae. Later uses were not so regal: after the Conquest it functioned in turn as a menagerie for exotic wild animals, a brothel and a poor-house for destitute Jews.

To see it, wander into the sportsground next door. The site itself is fenced.

### FETHİYE CAMİİ Map p94

**Mosque of Victory; Fethiye Kapısı**; 🚶 Fener or Fener

The Fethiye Camii was built in the 12th century as the Church of the Theotokos Pam-makaristos or Church of the Joyous Mother of God. It is usually closed so if you want to enter you'll need to organise a time with the **caretaker at Aya Sofya** (☎ 212-522 0989).

The original monastery church was added to several over the centuries before being converted to a mosque in 1573 to commemorate Sultan Murat III's victories in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Before its conversion it served as the headquarters of the Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarch (1456–1568); not long

after the Conquest Mehmet the Conqueror visited to discuss theological questions with Patriarch Gennadios. They talked in the side chapel known as the parecclesion, which has been restored to its former Byzantine splendour and functions as a museum; the rest of the building remains a mosque. Though not as splendid as those in the nearby Yariye Müzesi, the building's Byzantine mosaics have been beautifully restored and are well worth seeing, particularly the Pantocrator and 12 Prophets adorning the dome, and the Christ Hyperagathos with the Virgin and St John the Baptist in the apse.

### CHURCH OF ST MARY OF THE MONGOLS Map p94

**Church of Panaghia Mouchliotissa, Kanlı Kilise; Tevkii Cafer Mektebi Sokak, Fener**; 🚶 Fener or Fener

History buffs will find a visit here more satisfying than those specifically interested in architecture, as this squat red-brick church is quite unprepossessing from the outside and an unfortunate exercise in ecclesiastical



decorative overkill inside. Historically, though, it is extremely significant, being the only Byzantine church in İstanbul which has not, at some stage or another, been in Ottoman hands. It was consecrated in the 13th century and saved from conversion into a mosque by the personal decree of Mehmet the Conqueror. If you ring the bell on the outside gate you may attract the attention of the caretaker, who is usually happy to show visitors the church in exchange for a tip.

### AHRIDA SYNAGOGUE Map p94

Ahrida Sinagogu; Kürkçeşme Sokak 9, Balat; 📍 Balat or 🚗 Balat

Balat once housed a large portion of the city's Jewish population. Sephardic Jews, driven from Spain by the judges of the Inquisition, found refuge in the Ottoman Empire in the late 15th and early 16th centuries and settled in this quarter of the city. Many of their descendants still live here and speak the native Spanish dialect of Ladino. Like all other religious 'nations' within the empire, the Jewish community was governed by its supreme religious leader, the Chief Rabbi, who oversaw its adherence to religious law and who was responsible to the sultan for the community's good conduct. Today, you'll need to contact the current **Chief Rabbinate of Turkey** (☎ 212-243 5166; fax 212-244 1980; info@musevicemaati.com) if you wish to visit this or the neighbouring **Yanbol synagogue**. Ahrida is the oldest and most beautiful of the two, having been built before the Conquest.

To visit, you must contact the rabbinate at least 24 hours before your visit. You'll need to fax a copy of your passport identification papers. Call between 9.30am and 5pm Monday to Thursday, 9.30am and 1pm Friday.

### CHURCH OF ST STEPHEN OF THE BULGARS Map p94

☎ 212-521 1121; Mürsel Paşa Caddesi 85, Fener; 📍 Fener or 🚗 Fener

These days we're accustomed to kit homes and assemble-yourself furniture from Ikea, but back in 1871, when this Gothic Revival cast-iron church was constructed from pieces shipped down the Danube and across the Black Sea from Vienna on 100 barges, the idea was novel to say the least.

It's hard to say which is the more unusual: the building and its interior fittings –

all made completely of cast iron – or the history of its congregation.

During the 19th century, ethnic nationalism swept through the Ottoman Empire. Each of the empire's many ethnic groups wanted to rule its own affairs. Groups identified themselves on the basis of language, religion and racial heritage. This sometimes led to problems, as with the Bulgars.

Originally a Turkic-speaking people, the Bulgars came from the Volga in about AD 680 and overwhelmed the Slavic peoples living in what is today Bulgaria. They adopted the Slavic language and customs, and founded an empire that threatened the power of Byzantium. In the 9th century they were converted to Christianity.

The Orthodox Patriarch, head of the Eastern church in the Ottoman Empire, was an ethnic Greek; in order to retain as much power as possible, the patriarch was opposed to any ethnic divisions within the Orthodox church. He put pressure on the sultan not to allow the Bulgarians, Macedonians and Romanians to establish their own religious groups.

The pressures of nationalism became too great, however, and the sultan was finally forced to recognise some sort of religious autonomy for the Bulgars. He established not a Bulgarian patriarchate, but an 'exarchate', with a leader supposedly of lesser rank, yet independent of the Greek Orthodox patriarch. In this way the Bulgarians would achieve their desired ethnic recognition and would get out from under the dominance of the Greeks, but the Greek Patriarch would allegedly suffer no diminution of his glory or power. St Stephen's functioned as the main church of the Bulgarian exarch.

Architectural historians believe that the cast-iron building, based on a design by the Ottoman architect Housep Aznavour (1853–1935), replaced an earlier timber church on the site. Its interior, which features screens, a balcony and columns all cast from iron, is extremely beautiful, with the gilded iron glinting in the hazy light that filters in through stained-glass windows.

If the church isn't open, see if you can find the caretaker who lives on the grounds – he's usually happy to open the gate in exchange for a tip.

## MAŞALLAH!

If you visit Eyüp on a Sunday or holy day, you will see young boys in white suits being carried by their proud fathers and followed by a circle of relatives. These apprehensive yet excited young chaps are about to undergo one of the most important Muslim rites – *sünnet* (circumcision). Their white suit is supplemented with a spangled hat and red satin sash emblazoned with the word Maşallah (What wonders God has willed!).

Circumcision, or the surgical removal of the foreskin on the penis, is performed on a Turkish Muslim boy when he is between seven and 10 years old, and marks his formal admission into the faith.

On the day of the operation the boy is dressed in the special suit, visits relatives and friends, and leads a parade – formerly on horseback, now in cars – around his neighbourhood or city, attended by musicians and merrymakers.

The simple operation, performed in a hospital or in a clinic during the afternoon, is followed by a celebration with music and feasting. The newly circumcised boy attends, resting in bed, as his friends and relatives bring him special gifts and congratulate him on having entered manhood.

## ECUMENICAL ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE Map p94

Patrikhane; ☎ 212-531 9670; www.ec-patr.org; Sadrazam Ali Paşa Caddesi, Fener; donation requested; 🕒 9am-5pm; 📍 Fener or 🚗 Fener

The Ecumenical patriarch is a ceremonial head of the Orthodox Church, though most of the churches in Greece, Cyprus, Russia and other countries have their own patriarchs or archbishops who are independent of İstanbul. Nevertheless, the symbolic importance of the patriarchate, here in the city that saw the great era of Byzantine and Orthodox influence, is considerable. The patriarchate has been located in this district since 1601.

To the Turkish government, the patriarch is a Turkish citizen of Greek descent nominated by the church and appointed by the government as an official in the Directorate of Religious Affairs. In this capacity he is the religious leader of the country's Orthodox citizens and is known officially as the Greek Patriarch of Fener (Fener Rum Patriği). The relationship of the patriarchate and the wider Turkish community has been strained in the past, no more so than when Patriarch Gregory V was hanged for treason after inciting Greeks to overthrow Ottoman rule at the start of the Greek War of Independence (1821–32). The lingering antagonism over this and the Greek occupation of parts of Turkey in the 1920s no doubt explains the elaborate security around the patriarchate, including a security checkpoint at the main entrance.

The **Church of St George** within the patriarchate compound is a modest structure built in 1720. Its main glory is the ornate patriarchal throne that is thought to date from the last years of Byzantium. In 1941 a disastrous fire destroyed many of the buildings but spared the church.

## SULTAN SELİM CAMİİ Map p94

Mosque of Yavuz Selim; Yavuz Selim Caddesi; 🕒 tomb 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun; ferry from Eminönü; 📍 Fener or 🚗 Fener

By all accounts the sultan to whom this mosque was dedicated (Süleyman the Magnificent's father, Selim I, known as 'the Grim') was a nasty piece of work. He is famous for having his father poisoned and for killing two of his brothers, six of his nephews and three of his own sons. Odd, then, that his mosque is one of the most loved in the city. The reason becomes clear when a visit reveals the mosque's position on a lawned terrace with spectacular views of the Golden Horn – picnic spots don't come much better than this. The building itself, constructed in 1522, is a bit run-down, but is well used by local worshippers. Inside, its tilework and painted woodwork provide its most distinctive features.

## EYÜP SULTAN CAMİİ & TOMB

off Map p94

Mosque of the Great Eyüp; Camii Kebir Sokak, Eyüp; 🕒 tomb 9.30am-4.30pm; 📍 Eyüp or 🚗 Eyüp

This mosque complex occupies what is reputedly the burial place 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. He was buried outside the walls and, ironically, his tomb later came to be venerated by the Byzantine inhabitants of the city.

When Mehmet the Conqueror besieged Constantinople in 1453, he built a grander and more fitting tomb. The mosque that he built on the site became the place where the Ottoman princes came for the Turkish equivalent of coronation: to gird the Sword of Osman, signifying their power and their title as *padişah* (king of kings), or sultan. In 1766 Mehmet's building was levelled by an earthquake; a new mosque was built on the site by Sultan Selim III in 1800.

If you arrive by ferry (the best way), cross the road from the ferry stop and walk up İskele Caddesi, the main shopping street, until you reach the mosque complex. From the plaza outside the complex, enter the great doorway to a courtyard shaded by a huge plane tree; the mosque is to your right and the tomb, rich with silver, gold, crystal chandeliers and coloured Iznik tiles, is to your left. Even though women pray in a separate room to the right of the mosque, females can usually enter the mosque itself and stand at the rear if they are properly covered.

Be careful to observe the Islamic proprieties when visiting, as this is an extremely sacred place for Muslims, ranking fourth after the big three: Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem.

During your visit you may see boys dressed up in white satin suits with spangled caps and red sashes emblazoned with the word 'Maşallah'. These lads are on the way to their circumcision and have made a stop beforehand at this holy place. See boxed text, p99.

After visiting the mosque, many visitors head north up the hill to **Pierre Loti Café** (☞ 8pm-midnight), where the famous French novelist is said to have come for inspiration. Loti loved İstanbul, its decadent grandeur and the late-medieval customs of a society in decline. When he sat in this café, under a shady grapevine sipping tea, he saw a Golden Horn busy with caiques (long, thin rowboats), schooners and a few steam vessels. The water in the Golden Horn was still clean enough to swim in and the vicinity of the café was given over to pasture. The café that today bears his name has no connection to Loti, but it occupies a similar spot and offers views similar to the ones he must have enjoyed. It's in a warren of streets on a promontory surrounded by the **Eyüp Sultan**

**Mezarlığı** (Cemetery of the Great Eyüp). Many important people, including lots of grand viziers, are buried here.

The surest way to find the café is to walk out of the mosque complex to the plaza, turn right, and walk around the mosque complex (keeping it on your right) until you see a set of stairs and a steep cobbled path going uphill into the cemetery. Hike up the steep hill for 10 to 15 minutes to reach the café. Alternatively, a **cable car** (YTL1.30 each way, Akbil accepted) joins the waterfront with the top of the hill. The café serves *çay* (YTL1.60), *Türk kahvesi* (YTL2.70) and nargilehs (YTL8). Be sure to check the bill before paying. There's also a souvenir store here that sells postcards featuring historical views of the city.

## WESTERN DISTRICT WALK

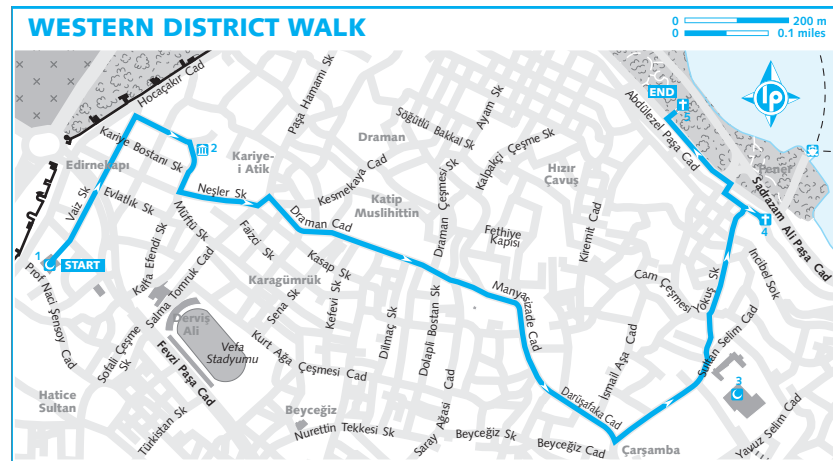
### Walking Tour

**1 Mihrimah Sultan Camii** This **mosque** (p96) was designed by Sinan on the orders of Mihrimah, Süleyman's favourite daughter. Sited by the gate of Theodosius' great wall it's always been hard to overlook. Make sure you admire its delicate stained-glass windows.

**2 Chora Church** We're going to go out on a limb here, and say that this is the best **museum** (Kariye Müzesi; p93) in the city. The exquisite Byzantine mosaics and frescoes were funded by Theodore Metochites, the auditor of the imperial treasury, and he certainly got lots of bang for his buck. It can be tricky to find, but is worth the effort. Refuel near here at **Asitane** (p163).

**3 Sultan Selim Camii** Süleyman the Magnificent built this **mosque** (p99) to honour his father, Selim the Grim. He didn't go overboard, and history indicates why – dad was famous for killing his own father, two of his brothers, six of his nephews and three of his own sons.

**4 Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarchate** After the Conquest, the patriarchate was kicked out of the building it used in Aya Sofya. It eventually found a home here in Fener and has happily existed in this location (p99) ever since. More interesting historically than architecturally, the compound is still worth a visit.



### WALK FACTS

**Start** Mihrimah Sultan Camii

**End** Church of St Stephen of the Bulgars

**Distance** 2km

**Time** Five hours

**Fuel stops** Enjoy an Ottoman lunch fit for a sultan at **Asitane** (p163)

### 5 Church of St Stephen of the Bulgars

Is this the city's most unusual building (p98)? It and all of its fittings are made of cast iron – it's a sort of kit-home prototype. Allow some time to admire the stained-glass windows. You'll find the church on the shore of the Golden Horn, close to the Fener ferry terminal, from where you can catch a boat back to Eminönü or continue up to Eyüp.

# GALATA & TOPHANE

Drinking **p174**; Eating **p163**; Sleeping **p205**

Beyoğlu (bey-oh-loo), the 'new' or 'European' section of İstanbul on the northern side of the Golden Horn, isn't really new. In the 19th century, new ideas brought from Europe by traders and diplomats walked into Ottoman daily life down its streets and boulevards. The Europeans who lived here in Pera, as the neighbourhood was formerly known, imported new fashions, machines, arts and manners to the city. This part of town had telephones, an underground train, a tramway, electric light and modern municipal government. There were even European-style patisseries and shopping arcades. In contrast, Old İstanbul (Stamboul), on the south bank of the Golden Horn, kept its oriental bazaars, great mosques, draughty palaces, narrow streets and traditional values – it seemed almost to be living in the Middle Ages when compared with its sophisticated neighbour.

There was a settlement in Galata/Karaköy before the birth of Christ. By the time of Theodosius II (r 408–50), it was large enough to become an official suburb of Constantinople. Theodosius built a fortress here to complete the defence system of his great land walls, and he called it Galata, as the suburb was then the home of many Galatians (Celtic people from Asia Minor). The neighbouring suburb of Tophane, which stretches along the banks of the Bosphorus, dates from a slightly later period and has historically been known as a maritime suburb where boats docked and offloaded cargo to huge warehouses. These days some of these are being converted into public spaces such as the exciting İstanbul Modern (below). The suburb took its name from a cannon foundry (*tophane*) that was built there during the reign of Mehmet the Conqueror.

Galata was home to traders from Genoa and Venice during both Byzantine and Ottoman times, and functioned almost like a separate colony, with distinct architecture, a preponderance of taverns and a decidedly European flavour. From the 16th century onwards, it had a largely Jewish population, hence the number of synagogues in the neighbourhood. In the 19th century, European émigrés arrived and built grandiose churches, schools and bank buildings – all reminders of the time when most of the empire's bankers and businesspeople were non-Muslims.

By the end of the last century, the once grand suburb was looking worse for wear. The city's largest municipal brothel was here, as well as drinking dens, vagrants and street prostitution. Visiting the city in the 1870s, Edmondo de Amicis wrote that it was '...full of shady characters of every description'. Fortunately times have changed, and these days the inexorable process of gentrification is under way, with tatty but grand apartment buildings being restored, and the city's artistic and student communities working and living here. Some commercial offices and banks, as well as small traders, remain, but it's largely residential and retains its European flavour.

The tramline between Zeytinburnu and Kabataş passes through Galata/Karaköy and Tophane, and there's a ferry terminal with some services to Kadıköy dock. The world's shortest and oldest (and probably most ornate) underground railway, the Tünel, runs up the hill from Karaköy Meydanı (Karaköy Square) to Tünel Square, at the southwestern end of İstiklal Caddesi. At the time of research, the railway was closed for renovation.

## İSTANBUL MODERN Map p103

☎ 212-334 7300; [www.istanbulmodern.org](http://www.istanbulmodern.org); Medis-I Mebusan Caddesi, Tophane; adult/child under 12yr YTL7/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Wed & Fri-Sun, 10am-8pm Thu; 📍 Tophane

In recent years İstanbul's contemporary-art scene has boomed. Facilitated by the active cultural philanthropy of the country's industrial dynasties – many of which have built extraordinary arts collections – museum buildings are opening nearly as often as art exhibitions. İstanbul Modern, funded by the Eczcıbaşı family, is the big daddy of them all. Opened with great fanfare in

2005, this huge converted shipping terminal has a stunning location right on the shores of the Bosphorus at Tophane and is easily accessed by tram from Sultanahmet.

The museum's curatorial program is two-fold: the first floor highlights the Eczcıbaşı family's collection of Turkish 20th century and contemporary art using a thematic approach; and the downstairs spaces host temporary exhibitions from local and international artists. While the first floor exhibits are interesting – look for works by Şekere Ahmet Ali Paşa (1841–1907), Orhan Peker (1927–78), İsmet Doğan (1957–), Omer

**INFORMATION**

PTT  
Tourist Information Office..... 2 E3 (see 7)

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES** (pp102-5)

Azadkapı Sokulu Mehmet Paşa..... 3 B2

Church of SS Peter and Paul..... 4 A2

Galata Tower..... 5 C2

İstanbul Modern..... 6 F1

Kamondo Stairs..... 7 C1

Neve Shalom Synagogue..... 8 C1

Synagogue..... 10 D2

**EATING** (pp145-8, 157-70)

Galata House..... 11 C2

Galata Konak Patisserie Café..... 12 C2

Göney Restaurant..... 13 C1

İstanbul Modern Café..... 14 D3

Karaköy Güllüoğlu..... 15 D2

Namlı..... 16 D3

Sicho Börek..... 17 D3

Tarhi Karaköy Balık Lokantası..... 18 C3

**SHOPPING** (pp131-4)

İstanbul Modern Gift Shop..... (see 7)

**DRINKING** (pp171-7)

Ancient Galata Bar..... (see 24)

Tophane Narigilich Cafés..... 19 F1

**NIGHTLIFE** (pp179-84)

Nardis Jazz Club..... 20 C2

**ARTS** (pp185-90)

Schneider Temple Art Centre..... 21 C2

**SPORTS & ACTIVITIES** (pp191-6)

Ceyme Hamamı..... 22 C3

Yejdiñrek Hamamı..... 23 B2

**TRANSPORT** (pp230-5)

Ferries to Kadıköy..... 28 D4

Karaköy International Maritime Passenger Terminal..... 29 E3

Turkish Maritime Lines Office..... 30 D3

**World House Hotel**..... 26 C2

**Apartment Hotel**..... 27 C1

**Eklektik Guest House**..... 25 D1

**Galata Residence Camondo**..... 26 C2

Kaleşi (1932–), Cihat Burak (1915–94), İhsan Cemal Karaburçak (1897–1970), Avni Arbaş (1919–2003), Sema Gürbüz (1960–) and Adnan Çoker (1927–) – it's the temporary exhibitions and permanent installations in the downstairs spaces that really stand out. Unfortunately, plans by Museum Director David Elliott to replace the less interesting works in the upstairs exhibit with international acquisitions and to give even greater emphasis to travelling exhibitions were scuttled in 2007 after a disagreement about the museum's future direction with the gallery's main donor, Oya Eczacıbaşı, led to his resignation.

Downstairs, don't miss Richard Wentworth's *False Ceiling* (1995–2005), an installation of Turkish and Western books floating overhead that hints at important issues around the negotiation of cultural difference. The knockout piece in the permanent collection is probably Adnan Çoker's huge abstract canvas, *Retrospective* (1997).

The museum also has a dedicated interactive exhibition space for children called **Genç** (Young). Conceived and designed in association with the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, it runs education programs for children aged between six and 12. This is hands-on fun that also bolsters arts awareness – great stuff.

### **GALATA TOWER** Map p103

Galata Kulesi; Galata Meydanı, Galata; admission YTL10; ☎ 9am–8pm; 🕌 Karaköy  
The cylindrical Galata Tower stands sentry over the approach to 'new' İstanbul. For centuries the tallest structure in Beyoğlu, it dominates the skyline north of the Golden Horn.

Originally constructed in 1348, the tower was the high point (at 67m, literally and figuratively) in the Genoese fortifications of Galata, and has been rebuilt many times. It has survived a number of earthquakes, as well as the demolition of the rest of the Genoese walls in the mid-19th century.

The paved **public square** surrounding the tower was created by the municipality as part of the ongoing Beyoğlu Beautification Project and it's been a big hit with locals of all ages, who gather each day to play football and backgammon, drink tea, buy food from the street vendors and swap local news.

There is a **cafeateria** (tea YTL3.50, beer YTL7) on the 8th floor of the tower where you can enjoy a drink, and a vertiginous **panorama balcony** offering spectacular 360-degree views of the city. To be frank, we don't think the view (as spectacular as it is) justifies the steep admission cost.

### **AZAPKAPI SOKOLLU MEHMET PAŞA CAMİİ** Map p103

Tersane Caddesi, Galata; 🕌 Karaköy or 🕌 Tersane Caddesi

This pretty mosque, designed by Sinan and built in 1577, is unusual in that it and the minaret are raised on a platform. Like Sinan's Rüstem Paşa Camii over the Golden Horn (also on a raised platform), it was commissioned by Sokollu Mehmet Paşa, a grand vizier of Süleyman the Magnificent. Today it's overshadowed by the approach to Atatürk Bridge and seems to almost shrink back from the traffic mayhem of Tersane Caddesi. Still, it's well worth a visit, particularly for its fine marble mihrab and *mimber*. Look for the attendant if the mosque is locked; a tip is expected. Don't miss the nearby rococo **fountain** (*sebil*) built by Saliha Valide Hatun, mother of Mahmut I.

### **ARAP CAMİİ** Map p103

Arab Mosque; Galata Mahkemesi Sokak, Galata; 🕌 Karaköy or 🕌 Tersane Caddesi

This mosque is the only surviving place of worship built by the Genoese; it was the largest of the Latin churches in the city. Dating from 1337, it was converted to a mosque by Spanish Moors in the 16th century. It has a simple plan – long hall, tall square belfry-cum-minaret – with ornate flourishes such as the galleries added in the 20th century. Look for an attendant if the mosque is locked; he may be willing to show you the interior in exchange for a tip.

### **KAMONDO STAIRS** Map p103

Galata; 🕌 Karaköy or 🕌 Tersane Caddesi

The curvaceous 18th-century Kamondo Stairs, one of Beyoğlu's most distinctive pieces of urban design, run south from Kart Çınar Sokak. Around the corner from the stairs you'll find the **Schneidertempel Art Centre** (p187). This art gallery, which is housed in a modest former synagogue, hosts shows of Jewish art, usually contemporary and local in origin.

### **CHURCH OF SS PETER & PAUL**

Map p103

SS Pierre et Paul; ☎ 212-249 2385; Galata Kulesi Sokak 44, Galata; 🕒 mass 7.30am daily & 11am Sun (in Italian); 🕌 Karaköy

Tucked away in one of the steep streets below Galata Tower you'll find the small grey-and-white doorway to the courtyard of the Church of SS Peter and Paul. A Dominican church originally stood on this site, but the building you see today dates from the mid-19th century. It's the work of the Fossati brothers who also designed the Dutch and Russian consulate buildings (both in Beyoğlu). Like many other Latin churches in the city, its courtyard design reflects the Ottoman ruling that Latin churches could not be built directly fronting onto a road or on top of a hill (the **Church of St Mary Draperis** on İstiklal Caddesi is another example of this). The church backs onto a section of the Genoese fortifications. It's not open very often – ring the bell and try your luck.

### **NEVE SHALOM SYNAGOGUE**

Map p103

☎ 212-293 7566; Büyük Hendek Caddesi 61, Galata; 🕌 Karaköy

During the 19th century, Galata had a large Sephardic Jewish population and a number of synagogues. Most of this community has now moved to other residential areas in the city, but the synagogues remain. Tragically, this building in particular seems to have become a target for anti-Jewish extremists and it has suffered two attacks in recent decades – a brutal massacre by Arab gunmen during the summer of 1986 and a 2003 car bomb attack carried out by a motley group of Turkish Muslims inspired by Osama bin Laden.

## **GALATA WALK**

### **Walking Tour**

**1 İstanbul Modern** It's hip, it's hot and it's undeniably the centre of a happening scene. One of a number of impressive new art galleries to have opened in İstanbul in the past few years, **İstanbul Modern** (p102) has a great location, an interesting permanent collection and a program of knockout temporary exhibitions.



### **WALK FACTS**

**Start** İstanbul Modern

**End** Galata Tower

**Distance** 1.5km

**Time** Two hours

**Fuel stops** Karaköy Güllüglü (p165), Galata Konak Patisserie Café (p164)

**2 Sugar hit** Snaffle an assortment of the best baklava in the city at **Karaköy Güllüglü** (p165).

**3 Kamondo Stairs** Built in the 18th century by the Jewish banking family after whom they are named, the **Kamondo Stairs** (opposite) are one of Beyoğlu's most distinctive pieces of urban design. They also featured in a famous photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson.

**4 Schneidertempel Art Center** The modest synagogue in which this **art gallery** (p187) is housed attests to this area's Jewish heritage. Nearby Voyvoda Caddesi was once full of banks run by Jewish and Armenian businessmen, and a number of synagogues remain in the area.

**5 Galata Tower** The most notable structure on the Beyoğlu skyline, this **tower** (opposite) was built by the Genoese in 1348. Originally named the Tower of Christ, it has been a prison, observatory and lookout but now is strictly for tourists. The view from the top is quite spectacular.

# İSTİKLAL & AROUND

Drinking [p175](#); Eating [p165](#); Shopping [p140](#); Sleeping [p206](#)

İstiklal Caddesi (Independence Ave) is the backbone of Beyoğlu. Formerly known as the Grande Rue de Pera, it has historically been home to the city's smartest shops, European embassies and churches, many impressive residential buildings and a scattering of fashionable teashops and restaurants. To be in the groove last century, Istanbul needed to work, sleep and shop within its orbit.

All this changed after independence when the capital moved to Ankara; the glamorous shops and restaurants closed, the grand buildings became dilapidated and the surrounds took on a decidedly sleazy air. Fortunately, the new millennium has brought about a rebirth, and the boulevard is once again crowded with throngs of locals who come to eat in the atmosphere-laden restaurants, drink in the bars and clubs that line the side streets and browse in the hundreds of shops crammed along its length. This *zeitgeist* can be attributed to the inspired Beyoğlu Beautification Project, an initiative that has been steered by the municipality and which has seen the street becoming a pedestrian thoroughfare, security being a focus, buildings being restored, and awnings and street signage conforming to rigid urban design specifications (all shop signs are in gold, for instance).

Known to locals simply as İstiklal, the street stretches between Tünel and Taksim Squares. An historic tram rattles along its length every 30 minutes or so – you'll need to buy a ticket from the Tünel station or a vendor in Taksim Square or have an Akbil (see [p233](#)) to get on. To the northwest of Tünel is the area known as Asmalımescit, filled with meyhanes, stylish Western-style brasseries and art galleries. Tepebaşı, the pocket that is home to the famous Pera Palas Otelı (Pera Palace Hotel; [p110](#)) and the newly opened Pera Museum ([p110](#)), is behind Asmalımescit.

Midway along the boulevard is Galatasaray Square, occupied since 1868 by its namesake, the Galatasaray Lycée. This school was established by Sultan Abdül Aziz, who wanted a place where students could listen to lectures in both Turkish and French. Today it's a prestigious public school. On the opposite side of the street are the Çiçek Pasajı (Flower Passage; [p110](#)), the busy Balık Pazar (Fish Market) and Nevizade Sokak, the most famous restaurant strip in the city.

To the east and south of the lycée are the areas known as Çukurcuma and Cihangir. Çukurcuma is where you'll find many of the city's best antique shops and Cihangir is an upmarket residential area where trendy bars and cafés are found and where much of the city's Western expat community lives.

Beyoğlu is one of the city's major transport hubs. Buses to every part of the city leave from the bus station at Taksim Square and a modern metro system travels between Taksim and the ritzy residential and shopping suburbs to its north, terminating in Levent. A recently opened funicular between the square and the terminus of the Zeytinburnu–Kabataş tramline has delighted commuters and made accessing this most fascinating suburb from the Old City extremely easy.

## **GALATA MEVLEVİHANESİ** Map [p107](#)

Museum of Court Literature, Divan Edebiyatı Müzesi; ☎ 212-245 4141; Galipdede Caddesi 15, Tünel; admission YTL2; 🕒 9.30am–5pm Tue–Sun; 🚠 Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

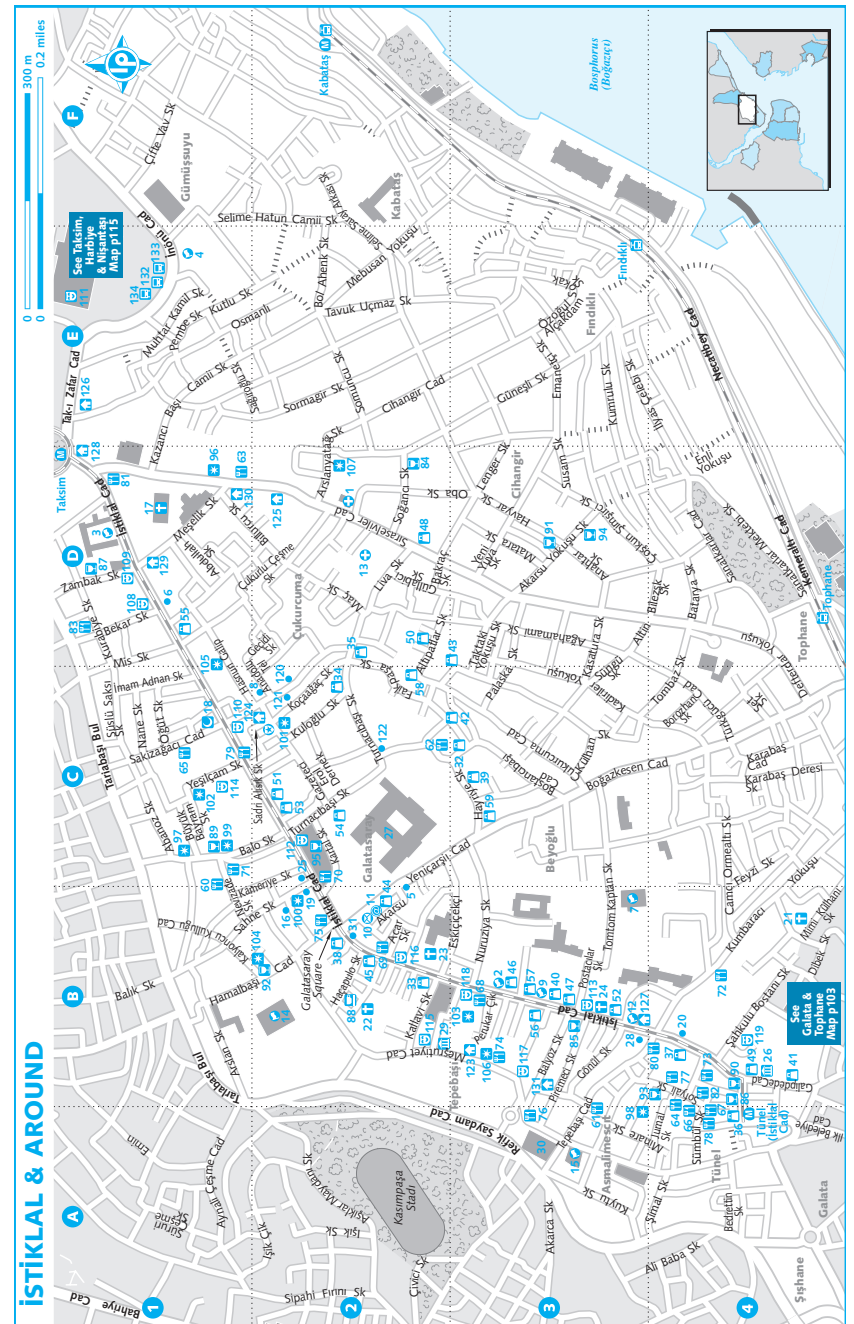
If you thought the Hare Krishnas or the Harlem congregations were the only religious orders to celebrate their faith through music and movement, think again. Those sultans of spiritual spin known as the 'whirling dervishes' have been twirling their way to a higher plane ever since the 13th century and show no sign of slowing down soon.

The Mevlevi *tarika* (order), founded in Konya during the 13th century, flourished throughout the Ottoman Empire. Like

several other orders, the Mevlevis stressed the unity of humankind before God regardless of creed.

The whirling dervishes took their name from the great Sufi mystic and poet, Celaleddin Rumi (1207–73), called Mevlana (Our Leader) by his disciples. Sufis seek mystical communion with God through various means. For Mevlana, it was through a *sema* (ceremony) involving chants, prayers, music and a whirling dance. The whirling induced a trancelike state that made it easier for the mystic to seek spiritual union with God.

Dervish orders were banned in the early days of the Turkish republic because of their ultraconservative religious politics.



## İSTİKLAL & AROUND

### INFORMATION

Alman Hastanesi (German Hospital).....	1	D2
Canadian Consulate.....	2	B3
French Consulate.....	3	D1
German Consulate.....	4	E1
Goethe İnstitut.....	5	B2
İstanbul Kitabevi (Biletix).....	6	D1
Italian Consulate.....	7	B3
Lambda.....	8	C2
Netherlands Consulate.....	9	B3
PTT.....	10	B2
Robin Hood İnternet Caf�.....	11	B2
Russian Consulate.....	12	B3
Taksim Hastanesi.....	13	D2
UK Consulate.....	14	B2
US Consulate.....	15	A3

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (pp106-13)

Avrupa & Aslihan Pasajıs.....	16	B2
Aya Triyada Kilisesi.....	17	D1
Aga Camii.....	18	C1
Balık Pazarı.....	19	C2
Botter House.....	20	B4
Christ Church.....	21	B4
Church of Panaya İsoıyon.....	22	B2
Church of San Antonio di Padua.....	23	B2
Church of St Mary Draperis.....	24	B3
Çiçek Pasajı.....	25	C2
Galata Mevlevihanesi.....	26	B4
Galatasaray Lyc�e.....	27	C2
Patisserie Markiz.....	28	B3
Pera Museum.....	29	B2
Pera Palas Oteli.....	30	A3
Yapı Kredi Bankası Gallery.....	31	B2

### SHOPPING (pp131-44)

A la Turca.....	32	C3
Ambar.....	33	B2
Anadol Antik.....	34	C2
art.i.choke.....	35	D2
Artrium.....	36	A4
Beyođlu Hali Evi.....	37	B4
Bis.....	38	B2
Bis 2.....	39	C3
Denizler Kitabevi.....	40	B3
Elvis.....	41	B4
Galeri Alfa.....	42	C3
Hikmet & Pinar.....	43	D3
Homer Kitabevi.....	44	B2
İpek.....	45	B2
İstanbul Kitapcısı.....	46	B3
İyig�n Oyuncak.....	47	B3
La Cave Wine Shop.....	48	D2
Lale Plak.....	49	B4

Leyla Seyhanlı.....	50	D2
Mavi Jeans.....	51	C2
Mavi Jeans 2.....	52	B3
Mephisto.....	53	C2
Mor Taki.....	54	C2
Mudo Pera.....	(see 47)	
Pandora.....	55	D1
Paşabah�e.....	56	B3
Robinson Crusoe.....	57	B3
Şamdan.....	58	C2
Sedef �alarkan.....	59	C3

### EATING (pp145-8, 157-70)

360.....	(see 116)	
Boncuk Restaurant.....	60	C1
Canım Ciğirim İlhan Usta.....	61	A3
Cezayir.....	62	C2
Changa.....	63	D1
Flamm.....	64	B4
Hacı Abdullah.....	65	C1
Helvetica Lokanta.....	66	A4
House Caf�.....	67	A4
İnci Pastanesi.....	68	B3
Kafe Ara.....	69	B2
Konak.....	70	C2
Krependedi İmroz Restaurant.....	71	C1
Leb-i Derya.....	72	B4
Lokal.....	73	B4
Lokanta.....	74	B3
Mado.....	75	B2
Mikla.....	76	A3
Nu Teras.....	(see 74)	
Refik.....	77	B4
Saf' Organic Bistro.....	78	A4
Saray Muhallebicisi.....	79	C1
Şimdi.....	80	B4
Simit Sarayı.....	81	D1
Sofyalı 9.....	82	B4
Zencefil.....	83	D1

### DRINKING (pp171-7)

5 Kat.....	84	D2
Ada.....	85	B3
Badehane.....	86	B4
B�y�k Londra Oteli Bar.....	(see 123)	
Club 17.....	87	D1
Haco Pulo.....	88	B2
James Joyce Irish Pub.....	89	C1
Kaffeehaus.....	90	B4
Keve.....	(see 36)	
Leb-i Derya.....	(see 72)	
Leb-i Derya Richmond.....	(see 127)	
Leyla.....	91	D3
Nu Teras.....	(see 74)	
Pano.....	92	B2
Pasific House.....	93	B4

Smyrna.....	94	D3
Urban.....	95	C2

### NIGHTLIFE (pp179-84)

Andon.....	96	D1
Araf.....	97	C1
Babylon.....	98	A3
Balans Music Hall.....	99	C1
Cumhuriyet.....	100	B2
Degustasyon.....	(see 19)	
Dej� Vu.....	101	C2
Gabile.....	102	C1
Garibaldi.....	103	B3
Ghetto.....	104	B2
Jazz Caf�.....	105	D1
Kokosh by Asmalı.....	106	B3
Roxy.....	107	D2
Tonique.....	(see 99)	

### ARTS (pp185-90)

AFM Fitaş.....	108	D1
AKbank Culture & Arts Centre.....	109	A4
Alkazar Sinema Merkezi.....	110	C1
Atat�rk Cultural Centre.....	111	E1
Atlas Sinemaları.....	112	C2
Borusan Arts & Culture Centre.....	113	B3
Emek.....	114	C1
Galeri Nev.....	115	B2
Galerist.....	116	B2
Italian Cultural Centre.....	117	B3
Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Centre.....	118	B3
Tank Zafer Tunaya K�lt�r Merkezi.....	119	B4

### SPORTS & ACTIVITIES (pp191-6)

Aquarius.....	120	C2
Ađa Hamamı.....	121	C2
Tarihi Galatasaray Hamamı.....	122	C2

### SLEEPING (pp197-209)

B�y�k Londra Oteli.....	123	B3
Hotel Residence.....	124	C2
Lush Hip Hotel.....	125	D2
Marmara Pera.....	(see 76)	
Marmara İstanbul.....	126	E1
Richmond Hotel.....	127	B3
Taksim Square Hotel.....	128	D1
Triada Residence.....	129	D1
Vardar Palace Hotel.....	130	D1
Yenişehir Palas.....	131	B3

### TRANSPORT (pp230-5)

Kamil Ko� Bus Ticket Office.....	132	E1
Ulusoy Bus Ticket Office.....	133	E1
Varan Bus Ticket Office.....	134	E1

Although the ban has been lifted, only a handful of functioning *tekkes* (dervish lodges) remain in İstanbul, including this one. Konya remains the heart of the Mevlevi order. For more information check [www.emav.org](http://www.emav.org).

The museum was originally a Mevlevihanesi (whirling-dervish hall) and a meeting place for Mevlevi (whirling) dervishes. The first building here was erected by a

high officer in the court of Sultan Beyazıt II in 1491. Its first *şeyh* (sheik) was Mohammed Şemai Sultan Divani, a grandson of the great Mevlana. The building burned in 1766, but was repaired that same year by Sultan Mustafa III.

Nowadays this former monastery has become a slightly run-down compound with overgrown gardens and shady nooks. As you approach the [Mevlevihanesi](#), notice the

graveyard on the left and its stones with graceful Ottoman inscriptions. 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 the street was named after, is here. Note also the tomb of the sheik by the entrance passage and the ablutions fountain.

Inside the Mevlevihanesi the central area is where the dervishes whirl. The galleries above were traditionally for visitors and separate areas were set aside for the orchestra and for female visitors (who were concealed behind the lattices). These days the upstairs area is only for the musicians who play during the ceremony. There are also exhibits of Mevlevi calligraphy, writing and musical instruments in the display cases surrounding the central area. The monastery was slated for a restoration as this book went to print.

### CHRIST CHURCH Map p107

☎ 212-241 5616; [Serdar Ekrem Sokak 82-84, T nel](#); ☎ prayer times 9-10am & 6-7pm daily, 10am Sun for communion; ☞ [Karak y](#), then funicular to T nel

Designed by CE Street (who also did London's Law Courts), the cornerstone of this Anglican church was laid in 1858 by Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, known as 'The Great Elchi' (*el i*, meaning ambassador) because of his paramount influence in mid-

19th-century Ottoman affairs. The church, dedicated in 1868 as the Crimean Memorial Church, is the largest of the city's Protestant churches. It was restored and renamed in the mid-1990s.

### PATISSERIE MARKIZ Map p107

[İstiklal Caddesi 360-2](#); ☞ [Karak y](#), then funicular to T nel

In Pera's heyday, there was no more glamorous spot to be seen than Patisserie Lebon in the Grand Rue de Pera (now İstiklal Caddesi). The place to enjoy gateaux and gossip, it was favoured by the city's European elite, who dressed to kill when they popped in for afternoon tea. Noting this, tailors, furriers and milliners opened shops in the adjoining Passage Orientale and did a brisk trade, making it the city's most exclusive retail precinct.

Part of the patisserie's attraction was its gorgeous Art Nouveau interior. Four large tiled wall panels had been designed around the theme of the four seasons by Alexandre Vallauray, the architect of the Pera Palas Oteli, and were created in France. Unfortunately, only two (Autumn and Spring) survived the trip from France – they have adorned the walls ever since. With chandeliers, fragile china, gleaming wooden furniture and decorative tiled floor, the place was as stylish as its clientele.

In 1940 the Lebon was taken over by Avedis  akır, who renamed it Patisserie

## SEEING THE DERVISHES WHIRL

Even in Ottoman times, Galata's Mevlevihanesi was open to all who wished to witness the *sema* (ceremony), including foreign, non-Muslim visitors. Though banned for a short period in the 1920s by Atat rk, the tradition remained strong and continues today. It is a highlight for many visitors to the city.

When this book went to print, the dervishes whirled at 5pm every second and last Sunday from May to September, and at 3pm from October to April. The [performance](#) (adult/student under 24yr YTL30/25) lasted for 90 minutes, starting with a live performance of Sufi music. Though no official announcements had been made, it was thought that the ceremony would potentially be moved permanently to another *tekke* (dervish lodge) in Mevlanakapı in 2008.

There is a [performance](#) (☎ information & bookings 212-458 8834; adult/student under 24 YTL30/25) by the same group of dervishes in the exhibition hall on platform 1 at Sirkeci Railway Station near Sultanahmet at 7.30pm every Sunday, Wednesday and Friday. Works on the station building in 2008 could well mean that these performances relocate – ask your hotel for an update.

The most authentic ceremony can be seen most Monday nights at the Fatih *tekke* in the Western Districts of the Old City. This is the real deal, not a performance put on for tourists, and is highly recommended. The easiest way to attend is to go with [Les Arts Turcs](#) (☎ 212-520 7743; [www.lesartsturcs.com](http://www.lesartsturcs.com); İncili  avuş Sokak 37, Kat 3, Sultanahmet), an arts organisation cum tour company that charges YTL50 per person to give you a briefing about the meaning of the ceremony, take you to the *tekke* from its office near Aya Sofya and bring you back after the ceremony.

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.

Markiz. It continued to trade until the 1960s, when Pera's decline and a lack of customers led to its closure. Fortunately, closure didn't mean destruction – the building was boarded up and left just as it had been, fittings and all. In the 1970s, local artists and writers lobbied the authorities to have the patisserie and passage added to the country's register of historical buildings; this occurred in 1977, ensuring the entire building's preservation.

In late 2003 the magnificently restored patisserie re-opened to great acclaim. It is now run by Roberts Coffee: the coffee and cake are disappointing, but the glorious interior means that a stop here is worthwhile regardless.

### PERA PALAS OTELI [Map p107](#)

**Pera Palace Hotel; Meşrutiyet Caddesi 98-100, Tepebaşı; ☎ Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel** The Pera Palas was built by Georges Nagelmackers, the Belgian entrepreneur who founded the *Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits et Grands Express Européens* in 1868. Nagelmackers, who had succeeded in linking Paris and Constantinople by luxury train with his famed *Orient Express*, found that once he had transported his esteemed passengers to the Ottoman imperial capital there was no suitable place for them to stay. What was Nagelmackers to do? Why, build a new luxury hotel of course!

The hotel opened in 1892 and advertised itself as having 'a thoroughly healthy situation, being high up and isolated on all four sides', and 'overlooking the Golden Horn and the whole panorama of Stamboul'. Numbered among its guests were Agatha Christie, who supposedly wrote *Murder on the Orient Express* in Room 411; Mata Hari, who no doubt frequented the elegant bar with its lovely stained-glass windows and excellent eavesdropping opportunities; and Greta Garbo, who probably enjoyed her own company in one of the spacious suites.

As this book went to print the hotel was undergoing a total renovation and was covered in hoardings. Some consternation was being aired around town as to how sympathetic the renovation will be to the building's rich cultural and architectural history.

### PERA MUSEUM [Map p107](#)

☎ 212-3349900; [www.peramuzesi.org.tr](http://www.peramuzesi.org.tr); Meşrutiyet Caddesi 65, Tepebaşı; adult/students & child over 12yr/child under 12yr YTL7/3/2;

🕒 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, noon-6pm Sun;

☎ Karaköy, then funicular to Tünel

The most beloved painting in the Turkish canon – Osman Hamdi Bey's *The Tortoise Trainer* – sold at auction in late 2005 for a massive US\$3.5 million, making it the most expensive art purchase of recent times. Turks were worried that the painting might be lost to the nation, so there was rejoicing when this new, privately funded museum announced that it had been the successful bidder and that the painting would be the focal point of its wonderful Orientalist painting collection. Acquired by Suna and İnan Kıraç over decades, this collection consists of more than 300 paintings with Turkish Orientalist themes. Its canvasses by Turkish and European artists provide fascinating glimpses into the Ottoman world from the 17th to the early 20th century. Sometimes these treatments are realistic, at other times they are highly romanticised – what's consistent is their focus on the rich costumes, fascinating domestic settings and varied individuals of the period.

The museum has conceived a program of long-term thematic exhibitions to showcase these Orientalist paintings, and has been loaned important Orientalist works from the Sevgi and Erdoğan Gönül Collection to supplement its holdings. At the time of research a show titled 'Portraits of the Empire' had been hung on the third floor and it was a total joy to visit – we're hoping that future shows will be just as good.

The museum also has two permanent exhibits: a top-notch collection of Kütahya tiles and ceramics, and a somewhat esoteric collection of Anatolian weights and measures. Three further floors are devoted to temporary exhibitions, mostly of local contemporary works in mixed media.

### ÇİÇEK PASAJI [Map p107](#)

**İstiklal Caddesi; ☎ Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim** Back in the days when the *Orient Express* was rolling into Old Stamboul and promenading down İstiklal Caddesi was the fashionable thing to do (how little things change...), 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 cheap restaurant-taverns where in good weather beer barrels were rolled out onto

the pavement, marble slabs were balanced on top, wooden stools were arranged and enthusiastic revellers caroused the night away. Renamed Çiçek Pasajı (Flower Passage), it continued in this vein until the late 1970s, when parts of the building collapsed. When it was reconstructed, the passage was 'beautified'. That is, its makeshift barrel heads and stools were replaced with comfortable and solid wooden tables and benches, and its broken pavement was covered with smooth tiles. The passage also acquired a glass canopy to protect pedestrians from foul weather. These days its raffish charm is nearly gone and locals in the know bypass the touts and the mediocre food on offer here and instead make their way behind the passage to **Nevezade Sokak** if they are seeking a great night on the town.

Next to the Çiçek Pasajı you'll find the **Balık Pazar** (Fish Market), where small stands sell *midye* (skewered mussels) fried in hot oil (get a skewer that's been freshly cooked). You'll also find stalls selling fruit, vegetables, pickles and other produce here.

At 24A Sahne Sokak, look for the gigantic black doors to the courtyard of the **Üç Horan Ermeni Kilisesi** (Armenian Church of Three Altars). Visitors can enter the church providing the doors are open. Opposite the church are the neoclassical **Avrupa Pasajı** (European Passage; aka Aynalı Pasajı or Arcade of Mirrors), a small gallery with marble paving and shops selling tourist wares and some antique goods, and **Aslıhan Pasajı**, an arcade jam-packed with second-hand book and record stalls.

### TAKSİM SQUARE [Map p107](#)

☎ Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim

The symbolic heart of modern İstanbul, this busy square is named after the stone 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.

Hardly a triumph of urban design, the square has a chaotic bus terminus on one side, a slightly pathetic garden laid out in its centre and the tracks of the İstiklal Caddesi tram circumnavigating this garden. Nonetheless, this doesn't prevent locals nominating it as a favoured meeting point and making the terraces of the nearby

Burger King and Simit Sarayı, which afford views over it, two of the most popular fast-food stops in the city. The government and municipality often organise for official events – usually related to the police or military – to be held here. During such events it's not unusual to see tanks and riot police surrounding the square and police sharpshooters atop nearby buildings.

The prominent modern building at the eastern end of the plaza is the **Atatürk Cultural Centre** (Atatürk Kültür Merkezi, sometimes called the Opera House; p188). In the summertime, during the International İstanbul Music Festival, tickets for the various concerts are on sale in the ticket office here, and numerous performances are staged in the centre's halls.

At the western end of the square is the **Cumhuriyet Anıtı** (Republic Monument), created by Canonica, an Italian sculptor, in 1928. It features Atatürk, his assistant and successor, İsmet İnönü, and other revolutionary leaders. The monument's purpose was not only to commemorate revolutionary heroes, but also to break down the Ottoman-Islamic prohibition against the making of 'graven images'.

## İSTİKLAL CADESİ WALK

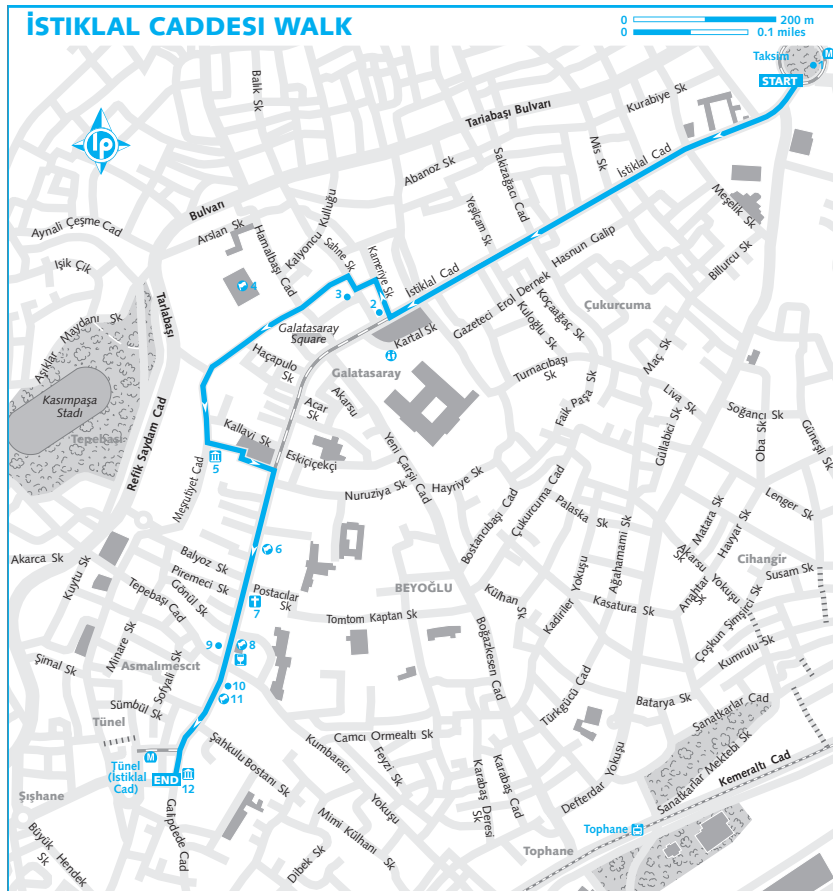
### Walking Tour

**1 Taksim Square** Start this afternoon walk at Beyoğlu's busy nerve centre, Taksim Square (left). This is where locals meet before setting off to promenade down İstiklal Caddesi. Named after the stone water reservoir on its western side, it's home to the city's major performing arts centre, the modernist **Atatürk Cultural Centre**.

**2 Çiçek Pasajı** The picturesque **Flower Passage** (opposite) has been hosting raucous crowds of drinkers since the late 1800s, and shows no sign of changing its ways any time soon. The **Balık Pazar** (Fish Market) on its western side is a great place to grab a fishy street snack.

**3 Avrupa Pasajı** One of many covered arcades in the Beyoğlu area, the European Passage (off Çiçek Pasajı, see opposite) is the most attractive, and though its shops are touristy it's worth a visit for its architecture alone.

**4 British Consulate General** This *palazzo*-style hulk was built in 1845 to plans by Sir Charles Barry, architect of London's



## WALK FACTS

**Start** Taksim Square  
**End** Galata Mevlevihanesi  
**Distance** 2km  
**Duration** Three hours  
**Fuel stop** Leb i-Derya Richmond (p176)

Houses of Parliament. Home to the British Consul General ever since, it has recently been restored after a dreadful bomb attack in 2003.

**5 Pera Museum** If, like many travellers, you have seen reproductions of the famous Osman Hamdi Bey painting *The Tortoise Trainer* and fallen in love with it, this is the place to view the painting itself. It's part of

the **museum's** (p110) wonderful collection of Orientalist paintings.

**6 Netherlands Consulate General** This handsome building dating from 1855 was designed by the Swiss-born Fossati brothers, who had been architects to the Russian tsar before they arrived in İstanbul to take the town by architectural storm and design many of its foreign embassies.

**7 Church of St Mary Draperis** Built in 1904, this church is behind an iron fence and down a flight of steps. It occupies the site of its previous building, destroyed by fire in 1870. During the Ottoman period, there was a law that prevented non-Muslim spires from appearing on the city skyline – no doubt the reason for this 'sunken' location.

**8 Russian Consulate** Another grand embassy designed by the Fossati brothers, this building dates from 1837. It replaced an earlier Russian embassy (now known as the Narmanlı Han) which is a bit further down İstiklal Caddesi on the opposite side of the road.

**9 Patisserie Markiz** The coffee and cake at this **café** (p109) are nothing to get excited about, but the Art Nouveau interior certainly is. It features gorgeous tiled wall panels designed around the theme of the four seasons by Alexandre Vallaury, the architect of the nearby Pera Palas Otelı.

**10 Botter House** Designed by Raimondo D'Aronco for the chief tailor to the imperial court of Sultan Abdül Hamit II, this was the

first Art Nouveau building in Pera. Unfortunately, it's currently in a deplorable state of repair and has been scaffolded for safety reasons.

**11 Royal Swedish Consulate** Yep, it's another grand embassy building. This one was built by the Swedes when they were one of Europe's major powers and is suitably grandiose.

**12 Galata Mevlevihanesi** As part of Atatürk's reforms in the 1920s, all the *tekke* (dervish lodges) in İstanbul were closed. While most are now in ruins, this **Mevlevihanesi** (whirling-dervish hall; p106), the most important of them all, remains open as a small museum.



# TAKSİM, HARBİYE & NİŞANTAŞI

Shopping p142; Sleeping p208

If you're a dab hand at air-kissing and striking a pose over a café latte, these leafy and exclusive suburbs are for you.

## ASKERİ MÜZESİ Map p115

**Military Museum;** ☎ 212-233 2720; Vali Konağı Caddesi, Harbiye; admission YTL4; 🕒 9am-5pm Wed-Sun; 🚠 Kabataş, then funicular to Taksim For a rousing museum experience, present yourself at this splendid museum, located 1km north of Taksim. Try to visit in the afternoon so that you can enjoy the concert given by the Mehter, the medieval Ottoman Military Band, which occurs between 3pm and 4pm daily (see below).

The large museum is spread over two floors. On the ground floor are displays of weapons, a 'martyrs' gallery (*şehit galerisi*) with artefacts from fallen Turkish soldiers of many wars, displays of Turkish military uniforms through the ages, and glass cases holding battle standards, both Turkish and captured. These include Byzantine, Greek, British, Austro-Hungarian, Italian and Imperial Russian standards. Perhaps the most interesting of the exhibits are the **imperial pavilions** (*sayebanlar*). These luxurious cloth shelters, heavily worked with fine silver and gold thread, jewels, precious silks and elegant tracery, were the battle headquarters for sultans during the summer campaign season.

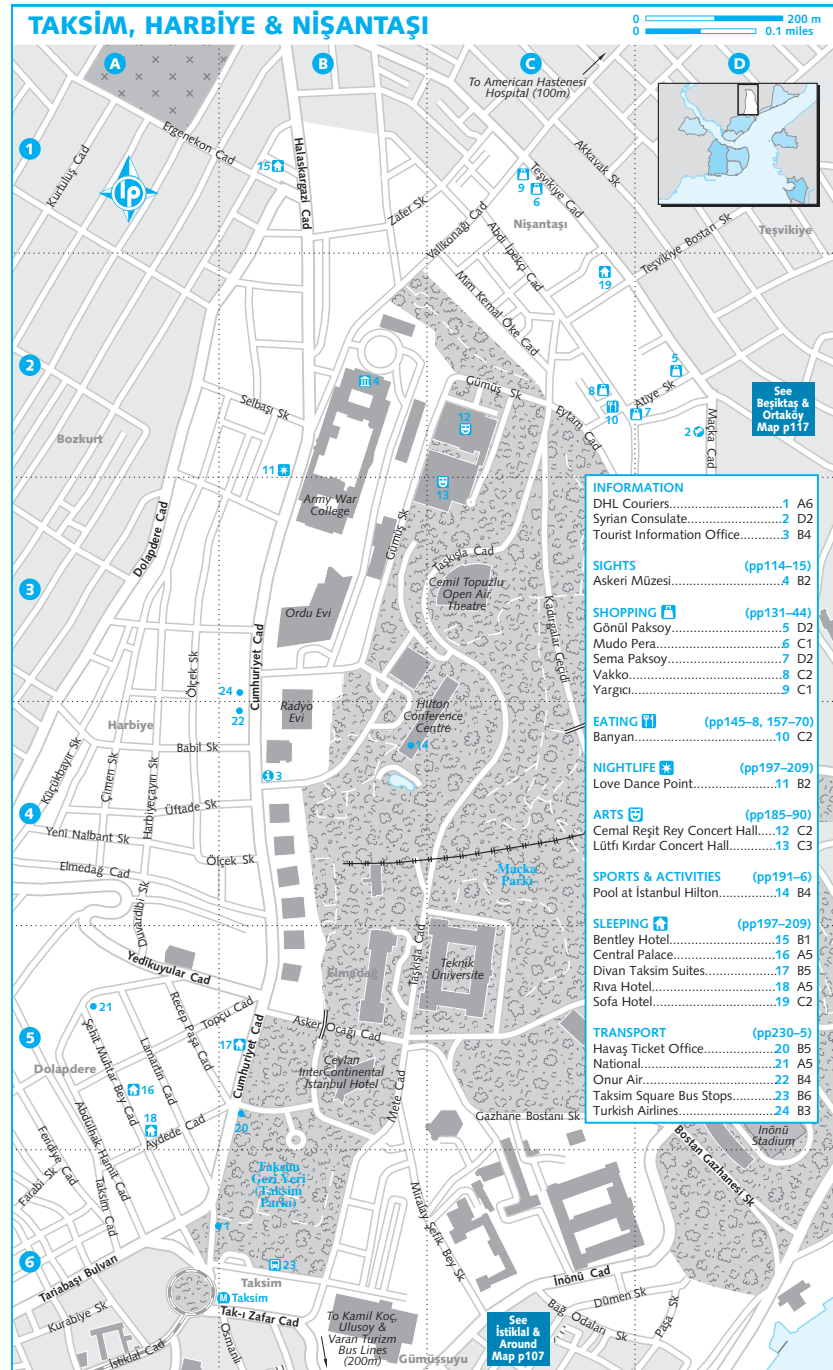
Also on show are a portion of the great chain that the Byzantines stretched across the mouth of the Golden Horn to keep out the sultan's ships during the battle for Constantinople in 1453; and a tapestry woven by Ottoman sailors (who must have had lots of time on their hands) showing the flags of all of the world's important maritime nations.

The upper floor has more imperial pavilions and a room devoted to Atatürk, who was, of course, a famous Ottoman general before he became founder and commander-in-chief of the republican army and first president of the Turkish Republic. This floor is where you really feel the spirit of the Ottoman Empire. It has exhibits of armour (including cavalry), uniforms, field furniture made out of weapons (eg chairs with rifles for legs), and a Türk-Alman Dostluk Köşesi (Turco-German Friendship Corner) with mementos of Turkish and German military collaboration before and during WWI.

Outside the museum, to the east of the building, you'll find cannons, including Gatling guns cast in Vienna, bearing the sultan's monogram. More of the Golden Horn's great chain is here as well.

Perhaps the best reason to visit this museum is to view the short **concert** by the Mehter. According to historians, the Mehter was the world's first true military band. Its purpose was not to make pretty music for dancing, but to precede the conquering Ottoman *paşas* (governor) into vanquished towns, impressing upon the defeated populace their new, subordinate status. Children in particular will love watching them march with their steady, measured pace, then turning all together to face the left side of the line of march, then the right side.

The easiest way to get to the museum is to walk up Cumhuriyet Caddesi from Taksim Square. This will take around 15 minutes.



# BEŞİKTAŞ & ORTAKÖY

Drinking [p177](#); Eating [p169](#); Sleeping [p209](#)

As well as being a major transport hub and the home of one of the 'Big Three' football teams (see [p196](#)), Beşiktaş has the largest concentration of Ottoman pleasure palaces and pavilions in İstanbul. French writer Pierre Loti described the shoreline here as a '...line of palaces white as snow, placed at the edge of the sea on marble docks' and the description is still as accurate as it is evocative. This is where the unrepentantly over-the-top Dolmabahçe Palace ([below](#)) and the ritzy Çırağan Palace Hotel Kempinski ([p177](#)), a former Ottoman royal palace, are located.

A slightly more restrained tone is evident at Yıldız Şale, a palace set in the Yıldız Parkı ([p119](#)). While its designer didn't go as far as eschewing the ornate and ostentatious (heaven forbid!), this building has a more human scale than its waterside equivalents and scores high on the charm-o-meter.

The nearby suburb of Ortaköy is nowhere near as grand as Beşiktaş, but has considerable charm, particularly on warm summer nights, when its main square is crowded with locals dining at its trendy waterside restaurants or enjoying an after-dinner coffee and ice cream by the water. Later in the evening, the clubbing set hits the nearby super-venues on the Bosphorus, most of which are located on or near Muallim Naci Caddesi. Known as the 'Golden Mile', this sybaritic stretch finishes at the next-door suburb of Kureçesme.

It can be difficult to access Yıldız and Ortaköy, as narrow Çırağan/Muallim Naci Caddesi provides the only vehicular access and is inevitably jammed bumper-to-bumper with commuters making their way to or from the Bosphorus suburbs. This means that taxi rides here can be slow and expensive. Buses also get caught in the traffic jam and can be unpleasantly crowded. As a result, many people choose to catch a ferry or bus to Beşiktaş and walk the kilometre or so to Ortaköy rather than driving, bussing or catching a taxi.

If you're visiting Dolmabahçe only, this is easily accessed by foot (15 minutes) from the Kabataş tram stop and the lower stop of the Taksim Square-Kabataş funicular.

## DOLMABAĞÇE PALACE [Map p117](#)

**Dolmabahçe Sarayı**; ☎ 212-236 9000; **Dolmabahçe Caddesi, Beşiktaş**; admission Selamlık & Harem-Cariyeler YTL20, Selamlık only YTL15, Harem-Cariyeler only YTL10, camera YTL6, video camera YTL15; 🕒 9am-4pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun summer, 9am-3pm winter; 🚶 or 🚇 to Kabataş & then walk. These days it's fashionable for architects and critics influenced by the less-is-more aesthetic of the Bauhaus masters to sneer at buildings such as Dolmabahçe. The crowds that throng to this imperial pleasure palace with its neoclassical exterior and over-the-top interior fit out clearly don't share their disdain, though.

More rather than less was certainly the philosophy of Sultan Abdül Mecit, who, deciding that it was time to give the 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 his predecessor Sultan Ahmet I (1607-17) had filled in a little cove in order to build an imperial pleasure kiosk surrounded by gardens. Other wooden buildings succeeded the original kiosk, but all burned to the ground

in 1814. In 1843 Abdül Mecit commissioned imperial architects Nikoğos and Garabed Balyan to construct an Ottoman-European palace that would impress everyone who set eyes on it. Traditional Ottoman palace architecture was eschewed – there are no pavilions here and the palace turns its back to the splendid view rather than celebrating it. The designer of the Paris Opera was brought in to do the interiors, which perhaps explains their exaggerated theatricality. Construction was finally completed in 1856. Though it had the wow factor in spades, Abdül Mecit's project also did more to precipitate the empire's bankruptcy than to dispel rumours of it, and signalled the beginning of the end for the Ottoman dynasty. During the early years of the republic, Atatürk used the palace as his İstanbul base. He died here in 1938.

The palace, which is set in well-tended gardens and entered via its ornate imperial gate, is divided into two sections, the **Selamlık** (Ceremonial Suites; [p118](#)) and the **Harem-Cariyeler** (Harem and Concubines' Quarters; [p118](#)). You must take a guided tour (around 35 people per group) to see either section – if you have only enough time for



one tour, be sure to make it the Selamlık. In busy periods the tours leave every five minutes; during quiet times every 25 minutes is more likely. The full tour of the palace takes two hours.

The tourist entrance to the palace is near the ornate clock tower, built by Sultan Abdül Hamit II between 1890 and 1894. There is an outdoor café near here with premium Bosphorus views.

The charming **Crystal Palace** and the **Dolmabahçe Art Gallery** were closed for restoration at the time of research. When they re-open, the Crystal Palace in particular will be well worth visiting.

Don't set your watch by any of the palace clocks, all of which are stopped at 9.05am, the moment at which Kemal Atatürk died in Dolmabahçe on 10 November 1938. When touring the harem you will be shown the small bedroom he used during his last days. Each year on 10 November, at 9.05am, the country observes a moment of silence in commemoration of the great leader.

### DOLMABAĞÇE SELAMLIK

**Ceremonial Suites; at Dolmabahçe Palace; admission Selamlık only YTL15**

The tour starts by passing through opulent salons and halls to a room with glass cabinets displaying gaudy crystal, gold and silver tea sets. After visiting the palace mosque and ablutions room, things really start to get extravagant at the staircase, with a French crystal balustrade made by Baccarat. Here the Bohemian chandelier weighs close to 1000kg. The hallway at the top of the stairs has two Russian bearskins, a 2000kg chandelier and candelabras standing about 3m tall. Off this is a reception hall featuring ornate gilt ceiling and walls. These and the enormous carpet from Iran must have impressed the official visitors who came here to be received by the sultan.

If your eyes are popping out of your head, you haven't seen anything yet; the tour continues past exquisite parquet floors, Sèvres vases and Czechoslovakian meringue-like tiled fireplaces, through an exquisite hamam and past more monster candelabras. But even these extravagances are a mere prelude to the magnificent **Imperial Ceremonial Hall**, or Throne Room. Used in 1877 for the first meeting of the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies, this lavishly

painted hall comes complete with a chandelier made of Irish glass that weighs over 4000kg – the tour guides here maintain that it is the largest in the world. There are grated windows, from which the resident women could watch the goings-on, and gilt on every available surface. The hall was designed to hold 2500 dignitaries and other guests.

### DOLMABAĞÇE HAREM-CARIYELER

**Harem & Concubines' Quarters; at Dolmabahçe Palace; admission Harem-Cariyeler only YTL10**

This pink building houses the harem and concubines' quarters, which are not as lavish as the Selamlık but still worth touring. Though relatively cramped and plain by Dolmabahçe standards (which isn't saying much), they have some bizarre features, including the huge ornate bed used by Sultan Abdül Aziz, who was known by his subjects as Güreşçi (the Wrestler) due to his great size, considerable strength and predilection for the sport.

The tour passes through a post-circumcision resting hall, a couple of hamams and the Blue Hall, the sultan's reception hall in the harem. Note the hand-painted ceilings throughout and the amazing wallpaper in Atatürk's bedroom.

### DENİZ MÜZESİ Map p117

**Naval Museum; ☎ 212-261 0040; cnr Cazayır & Beşiktaş Caddesi, Beşiktaş; admission YTL4; 🕒 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Wed-Sun; 🚗 or 🚶 to Kabataş & then walk**

Though this museum is picturesquely situated on the Bosphorus shore, most landlubbers (including us) find it just a tad dull. Still, those of the naval persuasion will no doubt feel like dropping an anchor here for an hour or so.

Though the Ottoman Empire is most remembered for its conquests on land, its maritime power was equally impressive. During the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent (r 1520–66), the eastern Mediterranean was virtually an Ottoman recreational lake. The sultan's navies cut a swathe in the Indian Ocean as well. Sea power was instrumental in the conquests of the Aegean coasts and islands, Egypt and North Africa. Discipline, logistics and good ship design contributed to Ottoman victories.

The museum's prize exhibits are the sleek and swift **imperial caiques** in which the

sultan would speed up and down the Bosphorus from palace to palace. These boats are over 30m in length but only 2m wide. With 13 banks of oars, the caiques were the speed boats of their day. Those with latticework screens were for the imperial women.

You may also be curious to see a replica of the *Map of Piri Reis*, an early Ottoman map (1513), which purports to show the coasts and continents of the New World. It's assumed that Piri Reis (Captain Piri) got hold of the work of Columbus for his map. The original map is now kept in **Topkapı Palace (p62)**.

There's an outdoor display of cannons (including Selim the Grim's 21-tonne monster) and a statue of Barbaros Hayrettin Paşa (1483–1546), the famous Turkish admiral known also as Barbarossa who conquered North Africa for Süleyman the Magnificent. The admiral's tomb, designed by Sinan, is in the square opposite the museum.

### ÇIRAĞAN PALACE Map p117

**Çırağan Sarayı; Çırağan Caddesi 84, Beşiktaş; 🚶 Yıldız**

Not satisfied with the architectural exertions of his predecessor at Dolmabahçe, Sultan Abdül Aziz (r 1861–76) built his own grand residence at Çırağan, on the Bosphorus shore only 1.5km away from Dolmabahçe. The architect was Nikoğos Balyan, one of the designers of Dolmabahçe, and here he created an interesting building melding European neoclassical with Ottoman and Moorish styles.

Abdül Aziz's extravagance may have been one of the reasons why he was deposed in 1876, to be replaced by his mentally unstable and alcoholic nephew, Murat. Abdül Aziz later died in Çırağan under mysterious circumstances, probably suicide. Murat was in turn swiftly deposed by Abdül Hamit II, who kept his predecessor and brother a virtual prisoner in Çırağan. Murat died in the palace in 1904. In 1909 it became the seat of the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies and Senate, but in 1910 it was badly damaged by fire under suspicious circumstances.

The palace, which is now part of the **Çırağan Palace Hotel Kempinski (p209)**, has recently undergone a full restoration under the supervision of Ottoman art specialist, Professor Nurhan Atasoy.

### YILDIZ PARKI Map p117

**Yıldız Park; ☎ 212-261 8460; Çırağan Caddesi; admission free; 🕒 10am-9pm summer, 9am-5.30pm winter; 🚶 Yıldız**

Sultan Abdül Hamit II (r 1876–1909) didn't allow himself to be upstaged by his predecessors. He built his own fancy palace by adding considerably to the structures built by earlier sultans in Yıldız Parkı, continuing the Ottoman tradition of palace pavilions that had been employed so wonderfully at Topkapı. It was to be the last sultan's palace built in İstanbul.

The park began life as the imperial reserve for the Çırağan Sarayı, but when Abdül Hamit built Yıldız Şale, largest of the park's surviving structures, the park then served that palace and was planted with rare and exotic trees, shrubs and flowers. It also gained carefully tended paths and superior electric lighting and drainage systems. The landscape designer, G Le Roi, was French.

The park, with its kiosks, had become derelict, but was restored by the Turkish Touring & Automobile Association (Tur-ing) in the 1980s, under lease from the city government. In 1994 the newly elected city government declined to renew the lease and took over operation of the park. Today it's a pretty, leafy retreat alive with birds, picnickers and couples enjoying a bit of hanky-panky in the bushes.

Near the top of the hill (to the left of the road if you enter by the Çırağan Caddesi entrance), you'll see the **Çadır Köşkü**. Built between 1865 and 1870, the ornate kiosk is nestled beside a small lake and now functions as a café.

At the top of the hill, enclosed by a lofty wall, is the **Yıldız Şale** (Yıldız Chalet Museum; **Map p117**; ☎ 212-259 4570; admission YTL4, camera YTL6, video camera YTL15; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Tue-Wed & Fri-Sun, until 4pm winter), a 'guesthouse' built in 1875 and expanded in 1889 and 1898 by Abdül Hamit – both times for the use of Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany during state visits. As you enter the palace, a Turkish-speaking guide will take you on a half-hour tour through the building. The chalet isn't as plush as Dolmabahçe, but it's far less crowded (in fact, it's often empty), so you get more time to feast your eyes on the exhibits.

It would seem the Kaiser had enough space to move in, as the chalet has 64 rooms. After his imperial guest departed,

the sultan became quite attached to his 'rustic' creation and decided to live here himself, forsaking the palaces on the Bosphorus shore.

Abdül Hamit was paranoid, and for good reason. When eventually deposed, he left this wooden palace in April 1909 and boarded a train that took him to house arrest in Ottoman Salonika (today Thessaloniki, Greece). He was later allowed by the Young Turks' government to return to Istanbul and live out his years in Beylerbeyi Sarayı, on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus.

Yıldız Şale was to be associated with more dolorous history. The last sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmet V (Vahideddin), lived here until, on 11 November 1922, he and his retinue, accompanied by trunks full of jewels, gold and antiques, boarded two British Red Cross ambulances for a secret journey to the naval dockyard at Tophane. There they boarded the British battleship HMS *Malaya* for a trip into exile, ending the Ottoman Empire forever. On the way to the quay one of the tyres on the sultan's ambulance went flat; while it was being changed the 'Shadow of God on Earth' quaked, fearing he might be discovered.

In the republican era, the Yıldız Şale has served as a guesthouse for visiting heads of state, including Charles de Gaulle, Pope Paul VI and the Empress Soraya of Iran.

The first room on the tour was used by Abdül Hamit's mother for her religious devotions; the second was her guest reception room with a very fine mosaic tabletop. Then comes a women's resting room and afterwards a tearoom with furniture marked with a gold star on a blue background, which reminds one that this is the 'star' (*yıldız*) chalet.

During the 1898 works the chalet was expanded, and the older section became the harem (with steel doors), while the new section functioned as the *selamlık* (ceremonial suites). In the *selamlık* are a bathroom with tiles from the Yıldız Porcelain Factory and several reception rooms, one of which has furniture made by Abdül Hamit himself.

The grand hall of the *selamlık* is vast, its floor covered by a 7½-tonne Hereke carpet woven just for this room. The rug is so huge that it had to be brought in through the far (north) wall before the building was finished.

Around 500m past the turn-off to Yıldız Şale, you'll come to the **Malta Köşkü**, now a restaurant and function centre. Built in 1870, this was where Abdül Hamit imprisoned the deposed Murat V and his family. With its views of the Bosphorus, the terrace here makes a great place for a light lunch, tea or coffee.

If you continue walking past the Malta Köşkü for 10 minutes you'll arrive at the **Yıldız Porselen Fabrikası** (Yıldız Porcelain Factory; ☎ 212-260 2370; 🕒 9am-3pm). The factory is housed in a wonderful building designed by Italian architect Raimondo D'Aronco, who was to introduce Art Nouveau to Istanbul. Constructed to manufacture dinner services for the palace, it still operates and is open to visitors. There's a small **ceramics shop** (🕒 9am-7pm) at the entrance.

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 Square to the top of the hill should cost around YTL7.

### ORTAKÖY CAMİİ Map p117

**Büyük Mecidiye Camii, Ortaköy;** 🚶 Ortaköy Right on the water's edge, this mosque is the work of Nikoğos Balyan, one of the architects of **Dolmabahçe Palace** (p116). It was built for Sultan Abdül Mecit III between 1853 and 1855. With the super-modern Bosphorus Bridge now looming behind it, the mosque provides a fabulous photo opportunity for those wanting to illustrate Istanbul's 'old meets new' character. Within the mosque hang several masterful examples of Arabic calligraphy executed by the sultan, who was an accomplished calligrapher.

The mosque fronts onto Ortaköy Square, home to a pretty fountain, and popular waterfront cafés and restaurants.

## ÜSKÜDAR

Eating p169

Üsküdar (pronounced 'ooh-skoo-dar') is the Turkish form of the Byzantine name, Scutari, which dates from the 12th century. It comes from the imperial palace of Scutarium, once located on the point of land near **Kız Kulesi** (p123). The first colonists lived in Chalcedon (modern-day Kadıköy), to the south, and Chrysopolis (now Üsküdar) became its first major suburb; both towns existed about two decades before Byzantium was founded. The harbour at Chrysopolis was superior to that of Chalcedon so that, 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 of 1453.

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 during the Empire a big caravan left from here en route to Mecca and Medina for the Hajj, further emphasising its reputation for piety. Even today, Üsküdar is one of İstanbul's more conservative suburbs. Home to many migrants from rural Anatolia, the mosques are busier here, the families are larger and the headscarf is more obvious than elsewhere in the city. Like Kadıköy and the Western Districts, it's a fascinating and totally un-touristy place to explore.

The main streets radiate from the central square, Demokrasi Meydanı, where the ferry terminal and bus stations are located. The nearby suburbs of Harem and Kadıköy are to the south. **Dolmuş** to Harem travel along the main waterside road, Sahil Yolu, and buses to Kadıköy take Selâmi Ali Effendi Caddesi through the hills above town. Upmarket residential suburbs and two public parks, Büyüçik Çamlica and Küçük Çamlica, are located on these hills.

### ATIK VALİDE CAMİİ Map p122

**Valide İmaret Sokak;** 🕌 Üsküdar

This is one of the grandest of Sinan's İstanbul mosques, second only to his **Süleymaniye Camii** (p80). Experts rate it as one of the most important Ottoman mosque complexes in the country. It was built in 1583 for Valide Sultan Nurbanu, wife of Selim II and mother of Murat III. Nurbanu had been captured by Turks on the Aegean island of Paros when she was 12 years old, ending up as a slave in Topkapı. The poor woman had a lot to bear – first being kidnapped and then taking the fancy of Selim the Sot – but she was his favourite concubine and became a very clever player in Ottoman political life. The Kadınlar Sultanatı (Rule of the Women) under which a succession of powerful women influenced the decisions made by their sultan husbands and sons began with her. Murat adored his mother and on her death commissioned Sinan to build this monument to her on Üsküdar's highest hill. Like the Süleymaniye, it has an impressive courtyard. The tile-adorned mihrab is particularly attractive.

The mosque is located in the neighbourhood of Tabaklar, up the hillside away from Üsküdar's main square.

### ÇİNİLİ CAMİİ Map p122

**Tiled Mosque; Çinili Mescit Sokak;** 🕌 Üsküdar

This little mosque is fairly unprepossessing from the outside, but – boy oh boy – wait

till you see the interior! It is brilliant with İznik faience, 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). It's a 10-minute walk to get here from the Atik Valide Camii.

### MİHRİMAH SULTAN CAMİİ Map p122

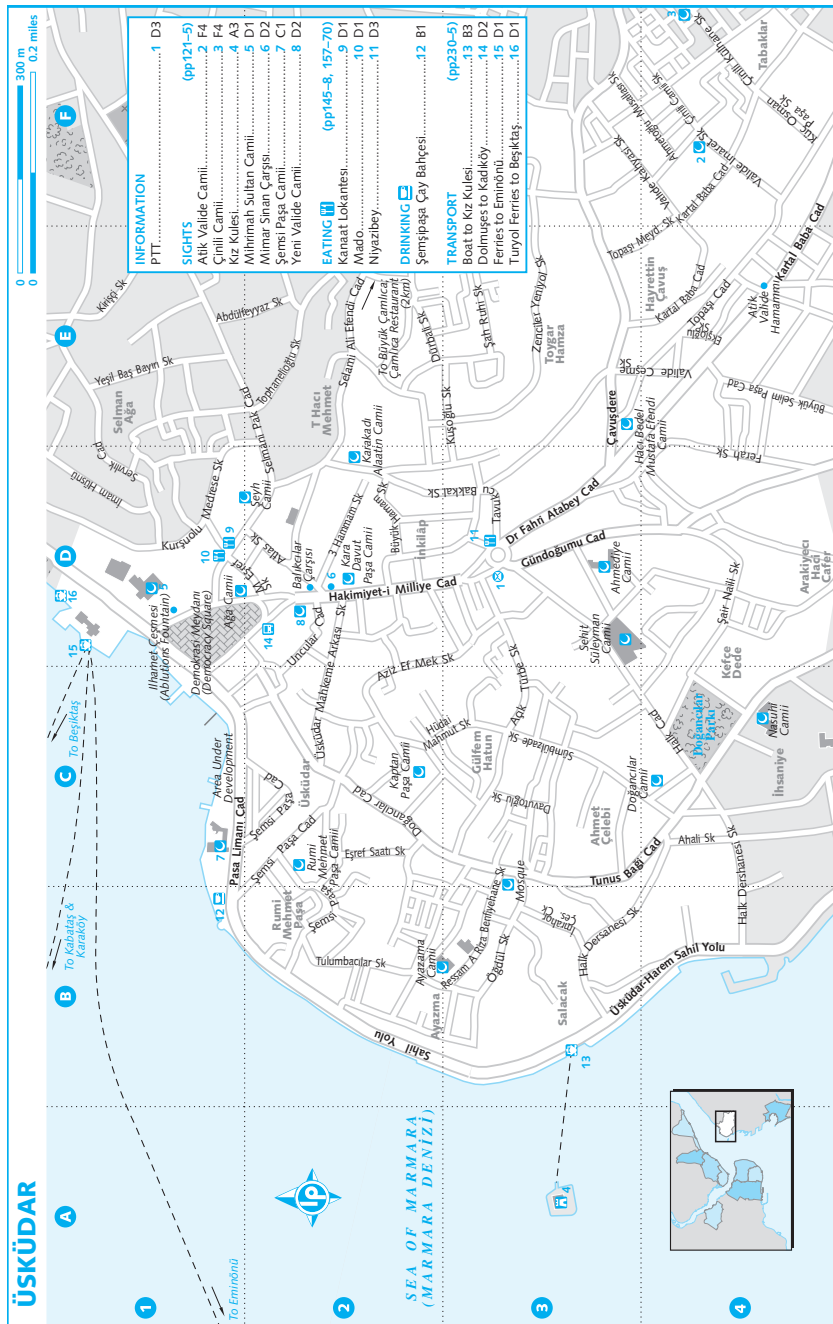
**Dock Mosque; Demokrasi Meydanı;** 🕌 Üsküdar Sometimes called the İskele Camii, this mosque was built between 1547 and 1548 by Sinan for Süleyman the Magnificent's daughter. Though imposing on the outside, it's a bit claustrophobic and dull inside. You'll find it northeast of the Demokrasi Meydanı (main square). Look out for its ablutions fountain in the traffic island, which is particularly attractive.

### MİMAR SİNAN ÇARŞISI Map p122

**Hakimiyet-i Milliye Caddesi; admission free;**

🕒 9am-6pm; 🕌 Üsküdar

Built by Nurbanu Sultan, mother of Sultan Murat III, between 1574 and 1583, this hamam is thought to have been the first designed by Sinan. Having fallen into ruins, part of it was torn down to accommodate construction of the avenue; the remaining half was restored in 1966 and is now cramped and crowded with shops.

**YENİ VALİDE CAMİİ** Map p122

New Queen Mother's Mosque; Demokrasi Meydanı;

🕌 Üsküdar

Unusual because of the striking 'birdcage' tomb in its overgrown garden, the Yeni Valide Camii was built by Sultan Ahmet III between 1708 and 1710 for his mother, Gülnuş Emetullah. After being captured as a child on Crete and brought to Topkapı, Gülnuş became the favourite concubine of Mehmet IV, and bore him two sons who would become sultan: Mustafa II and his younger brother, Ahmet. Built late in the period of classical Ottoman architecture, it lacks the architectural distinction of many of the suburb's other mosques. The odd wooden additions to the side that faces Demokrasi Meydanı were added as the entrance to the imperial loge.

**ŞEMSİ PAŞA CAMİİ** Map p122

Sahil Yolu; 🕌 Üsküdar

This charming mosque right on the waterfront was designed by Sinan and built in 1580 for grand vizier, Şemsi Paşa. It is modest in size and decoration – reflecting the fact that its benefactor only occupied the position of grand vizier for a couple of months under Süleyman the Magnificent. Its *medrese* has been stylishly converted into a library. The tomb of Şemsi Paşa, which has an opening into the mosque, is minded by a very friendly attendant, who is happy to show visitors throughout the complex for a small tip.

Next to the mosque you'll find the **Şemsi Paşa Çay Bahçesi**, a great place to recover from a hectic schedule of Üsküdar mosque viewing.

**KIZ KULESİ** Map p122

Maiden's or Leander's Tower; ☎ 216-342 4747;

🕒 noon-7pm Tue-Sun; 🕌 Üsküdar

İstanbul is a maritime city, so it's appropriate that the Kız Kulesi, 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 tollbooth 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, calling it Leander's Tower after the tragic youth who drowned after attempting to

swim across a strait to Europe to visit his lover, Hero. The object of his desire, who held a torch aloft from a tower to guide his way, is said to have been so distraught when he died that she plunged to her death from the tower. The problem with the story is Kız Kulesi is on the Asian shore – and anyway, it was the strait of the Hellespont (the Dardanelles), 340km away, that Leander swam.

More recently, the tower featured in the 1999 Bond film *The World is Not Enough*.

The tower is open to the public during the day as a café/restaurant. Small boats run from Salacak to the island every 15 minutes from noon to late at night, Tuesday to Sunday; a return ticket costs YTL6. We suggest giving this a miss, as the views from the island aren't great and the tower itself isn't very interesting inside.

**BÜYÜK ÇAMLICA** off Map p122

☎ 216-443 2198; Turistik Çamlıca Caddesi; admission free; 🕒 9am-11pm; 🕌 Üsküdar, then dolmuş or taxi

The term megalopolis is bandied about a fair bit to describe İstanbul, but it's only when you come to a spot like this that it becomes meaningful. Larger than many sovereign states, the city sprawls further than the eye can see, even when afforded this bird's-eye view. And what a view it is! A hilltop park with a crown of pine trees, Büyük Çamlıca is the highest point in the city and can be seen from miles away (you'll see it as you ferry down the Bosphorus, for example). It's beloved by İstanbullular, who flock here to relax, picnic in the pretty gardens, eat at the **Çamlıca Restaurant** (p170) and gaze upon their fine city. From the terraces you'll see the minaret-filled skyline of Old İstanbul, as well as the Bosphorus winding its way to the Black Sea.

Once favoured by Sultan Mahmut II (r 1808–39), by the late 1970s the park was a muddy and unkempt car park threatened by illegal and unplanned construction. In 1980 the municipal government leased the land to the Turing group, which landscaped the hilltop and built a restaurant such as Mahmut might have enjoyed. The municipal government took over management of the park in 1995.

To reach the hilltop from Üsküdar's main square, you can take a taxi (YTL9) all the way to the summit, or a *dolmuş* most of the way. For the latter, walk to the *dolmuş*

ranks near the ferry terminal, take a *dolmuş* headed for Ümraniye and ask for Büyük Çamlıca. The *dolmuş* will pass the entrance to Küçük Çamlıca and drop you off shortly thereafter in a district called Kısıklı. The walk uphill (pleasant but no great views) following the signs to the summit takes around 30 to 40 minutes.

## FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE MUSEUM

Map pp46–7

☎ 216-553 1009; fax 216-310 7929; Selimiye Army Barracks, Nci Ordu Komutanlığı 1; admission free; 🕒 9am–5pm Mon–Fri; 🚪 Harem or 🏠 Üsküdar & 🏠 Harem

The experience of visiting the Selimiye Army Barracks, where this museum is housed, is even better than the museum itself. The barracks, built by Mahmut II in 1828 is on the site of a barracks originally built by Selim III in 1799 and extended by Abdül Mecit I in 1842 and 1853. It is the headquarters of the Turkish First Army, the largest division in the country, and is 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 has remembered her for. Though they seem commonsensical from a modern perspective, it is hard to overstate how radical they seemed at the time. It really is amazing to hear that before she arrived, the mortality rate was 70% of patients and when she left it had dropped to 5%.

The museum is spread over three levels in the northwest 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 extraordinary views across to Old İstanbul. Here there are exhibits such as an original letter explaining how the lady herself defined being a good nurse.

To visit, you need to fax a letter requesting to visit 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 telephone number in İstanbul so that someone can respond to your request. The recruits who vet your papers at the entrance, show you from the security check to the museum, and take you on a guided tour are almost all young conscripts counting down the days until their military service is finished. They may not all speak English (although the tour is always in that language) but they are without exception charming and helpful. Their mothers would be proud!

The museum is about half way between Üsküdar and Kadıköy, near the fairytale-like clock towers of the TC Marmara University. To get here, catch a *dolmuş* from outside the ferry terminals in Üsküdar to Harem and ask locals to point you towards the Selimiye Kısıklı Harem Kapısı (the barracks' Harem Gate), a short walk away. Alternatively, a taxi from the ferry shouldn't cost more than YTL9.

## ÜSKÜDAR WALK

### Walking Tour

**1 Şemsi Paşa Camii** This cute-as-a-button *mosque* (p123) right on the waterfront was designed by Sinan. It is more modest than his usual work, but is none less pleasing for

## WALK FACTS

Start Şemsi Paşa Camii

End Çinili Camii

Distance 3km

Time 2½ hours

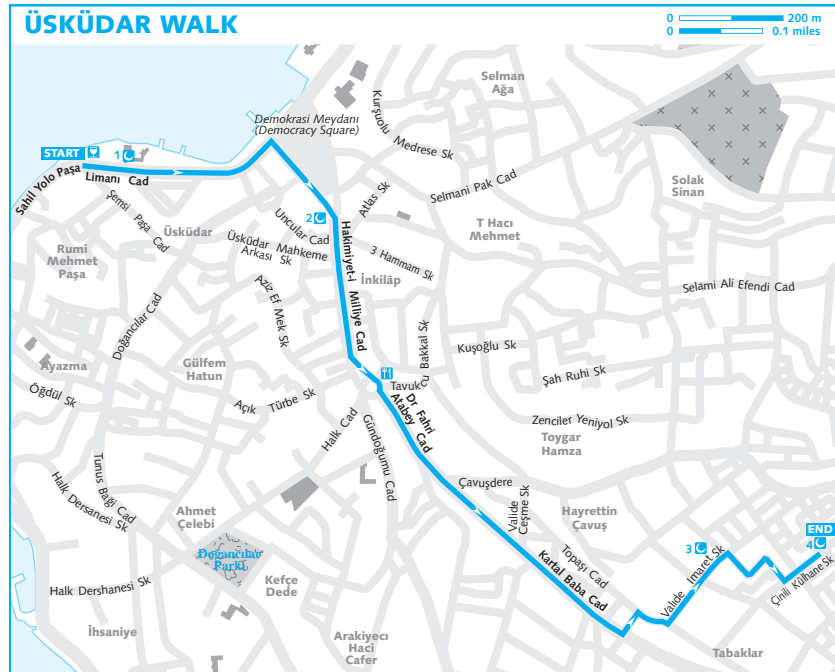
Fuel stop Niyazibey (p169), Şemsi Paşa Çay Bahçesi (p123)

that fact. The *çay bahçesi* next to the mosque complex is a wonderful spot for a glass of tea.

**2 Yeni Valide Camii** Sultan Ahmet III built this *mosque* (p123) in memory of his mother Gülnuş Emetullah, an extremely powerful valide sultan. Don't miss the striking 'bird-cage' tomb in its overgrown garden.

**3 Atik Valide Camii** This *mosque* (p121) is one of the 'big two' – Sinan's greatest İstanbul mosque complexes. Though not as spectacular as the Süleymaniye, it was designed to a similar plan and is also in a commanding location. It was built by Murat III.

**4 Çinili Camii** Yes, it's a modest and run-down little *mosque* (p121) but wow, how about those İznik tiles?! These were the bequest



# KADIKÖY

Drinking [p177](#); Eating [p170](#); Shopping [p144](#)

Legend has it that the first colonists established themselves at Chalcedon, now modern Kadıköy. Byzas, bearing the oracle's message to found a colony 'Opposite the blind', thought the Chalcedonites blind to the advantages of Seraglio Point (Seray Burnu) as a town site when he arrived in the area, and founded his colony (Byzantium) on the European shore, opposite.

Though there's nothing to show of these historic beginnings and no headline sights, Kadıköy is a neighbourhood well worth visiting, particularly as the half-hour trip here by ferry from Eminönü or Karaköy is so wonderful. There's fabulous fresh produce available in the market precinct near the ferry terminal; cafés and bars galore around Kadife Sokak; and one of the city's largest street markets, the Salı Pazarı ([p143](#)).

The two ferry docks – Eminönü and Karaköy & Kızıl Adalar – face a plaza along the south side of Kadıköy's small harbour. To the north is Haydarpaşa Train Station, a 15-minute walk from the ferry terminals. 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. Resembling a German castle, the neoclassical exterior is a prominent part of Kadıköy's skyline as you approach by ferry. It also has a very pretty, small ferry terminal.

Kadıköy's main street, Söğütlüçeşme Caddesi, runs eastward from the docks into Kadıköy proper; another main road, Serasker Caddesi, runs parallel to it. Busy Bahariye Caddesi runs perpendicular to both of them, around 300m inland, and continues on to the posh residential suburb of Moda.

Near the street market is Rüştü Saraçoğlu Stadium (the home of Fenerbahçe Football Club), and further on from this is the glamorous shopping and café precinct of Bağdat Caddesi, İstanbul's very own Rodeo Drive.

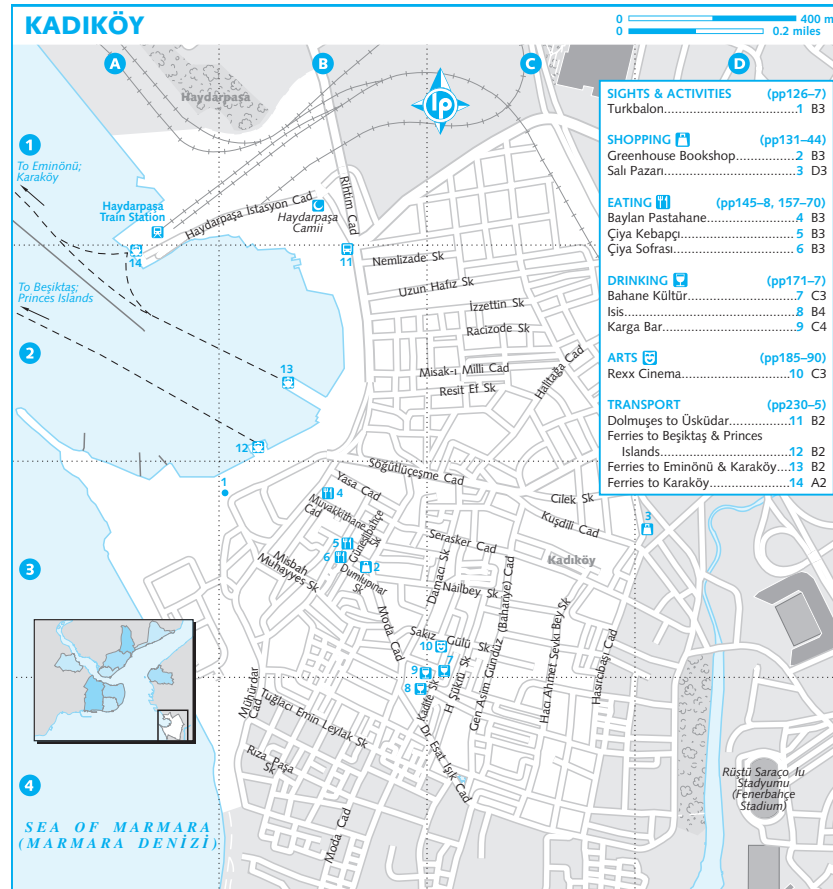
## THE INSIDER

If you read *Time Out İstanbul* while you're in town, you'll probably end up chortling over more than a few pieces by local writer, Attila Pelti. As well as his personal byline, he writes under a number of sobriquets – which we wouldn't dream of exposing here – and most of his pieces are written exercises in what is clearly a major preoccupation of his: deconstructing what it is to be an İstanbullu and a Turk. His dedicated (predominantly Western expat) readership can't get enough of his hilarious rants against horrible city phenomena such as Magandas (the local species of beefed-up, thick-as-a-brick petrol-heads) or Nişantaşettes (the local Paris Hilton equivalents, characterised by nasally voices and solarium tans). These readers cheered when he started a campaign against ridiculous tourist entry charges in İstanbul's museums, and collectively sniggered when he took the piss out of the Beyoğlu gallery-opening circuit, describing the 'inexplicable horror' of attending a Con-Art exhibition.

Though Attila's writing is seriously funny, it often has a truly serious – and important – subtext. Take a recent piece titled 'Absurd İstanbul', where he posited that it was truly absurd that in Turkey, Kurds aren't allowed to use letters essential to their own language because those letters don't exist in the official Turkish alphabet. Those letters are X, Q and W. But as he said 'then you look all around you, and you see a store called Queen's House, a company called Winsa and an art gallery called X-Ist... So when our own Kurdish citizens use those letters it's treason, but when Turks use it for good old-fashioned foreign-envy-fuelled catchy commercial gimmickry, it's suddenly okay?'

Attila knows that being opinionated in Turkey can be akin to playing with fire, and acknowledges that there is no tradition of critiquing in Turkish magazines, something that he hopes will change over time. The English version of *Time Out İstanbul* cleverly turns critique masked as humour and can do so because it's published in English and is written predominantly for a Western expat and tourist readership. He says that his aim is to 'throw hard questions out there and encourage Turks to start thinking about those questions and confront some of our national demons'. If he can achieve this through entertainment and humour, he says, he'll be happy.

Though he has lived around the world (his father is a Turkish diplomat, making him one of the 'diplobrats' he loves to lampoon), Attila thinks of İstanbul as home, and says that his favourite thing to do in the city is to catch a ferry to Kadıköy, where he drinks pickle juice in the market, browses for second-hand books, checks out the DVD and CD stores, grabs lunch and then enjoys a few drinks at [Karga Bar](#) ([p171](#)). And then it's back home to Beyoğlu, to ponder which shibboleth to deconstruct for the next edition.



of Mahpeyker Kösem (1640), wife of Sultan Ahmet I (r 1603-17).

**TURKBALON** Map [p127](#)

☎ 0216-347 6703; adult/student YTL15/10;

🕒 9am-8pm; 📍 Kadıköy

To see İstanbul from the air, head south along the waterfront until you come to the tethered Turkbalon, which will carry you 200m into the air to give you a 360-degree panorama of the city. Weather permitting, of

## OTHER NEIGHBOURHOODS

course. The balloon goes up every 15 minutes and stays in the air for 10 to 15 minutes.

**YEDİKULE HİSARI MÜZESİ** [Map pp46–7](#)  
**Fortress of the Seven Towers;** ☎ 212-584 4012;  
 Kule Meydanı 4, Fatih; admission YTL5; 🕒 9am-6.30pm; 📍 Yedikule or 📍 Yedikule

If you arrived in Istanbul by train from Europe, or if you rode in from the airport along the seashore, you will probably have noticed this fortress looming over the southern approaches to the city. One of the city's major landmarks, it has a history as substantial 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 in the structure. 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 **Porta Aurea** (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. The doorway was sealed in the late Byzantine period.

In Ottoman times the fortress was used for defence, as a repository for the Imperial Treasury, as a prison and as a place of execution. In times of war, ambassadors of 'enemy' countries were thrown in prisons; foreign ambassadors to the Sublime Porte often ended up incarcerated in Yedikule. Latin and German inscriptions still visible in the Ambassadors' Tower bring the place's eerie history to light. It was also here that Sultan Osman II, a 17-year-old youth, was executed in 1622 during a revolt of the janissary corps. The kaftan he was wearing when he was murdered is now on display in Topkapı Palace's costumes collection.

The spectacular views from the battlements are the highlight of a visit here. Note that the lack of handrails or barriers on the steep stone staircases can be offputting for some visitors.

While you're in the neighbourhood, consider a trip to Istanbul's best kebabçı, **Develi** (p163), one station east at Mustafa Paşa.

**RAHİMİ M KOÇ MÜZESİ** [Map pp46–7](#)

**Rahim M Koç Industrial Museum;** ☎ 212-369 6600;  
 www.rmk-museum.org.tr; Hasköy Caddesi 27;  
 adult/child & student YTL8/4, submarine adult/child  
 & student YTL4.50/3; 🕒 10am–5pm Tue–Fri, 10am–7pm Sat & Sun; 📍 Hasköy

Located on the Beyoğlu side of the Golden Horn, Hasköy was for centuries a small, predominantly Jewish village. In the Ottoman period it also became home to a naval shipyard and a sultan's hunting ground. Today, its main claim to fame is a splendid industrial museum. Founded by the head of the Koç industrial group, one of Turkey's most prominent conglomerates, it exhibits artefacts from Istanbul's industrial past. Its collection is highly eclectic, giving the impression of being a grab-bag of cool stuff collected over the decades or donated to the museum by individuals, organisations or companies who didn't know what else to do with it. This might sound like we're damning the place with faint praise, but this is far from the case. In fact, this is a corker of a museum that children in particular will love.

The museum is in two parts: a new building on the Golden Horn side of the road and a superbly restored and converted Byzantine stone building opposite. Exhibits are largely concerned with forms of transport: Bosphorus ferry parts and machinery; a horse-drawn tram; an Amphicar (half car, half boat) that crossed the English Channel in 1962; Sultan Abdül Aziz's ornate railway coach with its duck-egg-blue stain upholstery; cars (everything from ugly Turkish Anadol models to fabulous pink Cadillacs); a 1960 Messerschmitt; and even much of the fuselage of 'Hadley's Harem', a US B-24D Liberator bomber that crashed off Antalya in August 1943. Other exhibits look at how appliances and electronic devices work – the exhibition of how whitegoods work is particularly fascinating.

Wheelchair access is offered throughout the complex. What's more, excellent interpretive panels in Turkish and English are provided. Experts demonstrate twice a day (at 11am and 5pm) how the machines work. There are buttons galore to push, a lovely café right on the water, a convivial bar and an upmarket French brasserie. The submarine exhibit, from which children under eight years of age are barred, requires an extra ticket.

The museum is near the northern end of the old Galata Bridge (near where Hasköy Caddesi changes into Kumbarahane Caddesi). A taxi from Beyoğlu will cost around YTL7.

**MINIATURK** [Map pp46–7](#)

☎ 212-222 2882; www.miniaturk.com.tr; İmrahor Caddesi, Sütluçe; adult/child YTL10/3; 🕒 9am–5pm; 📍 Sütluçe or 📍 Sütluçe  
 We can't explain why this new museum has been such a hit with locals. Marketed as a miniature park that showcases 'all times and locations of Anatolia at the same

place at the same time', it's a bizarre tiny town stocked with models of Turkey's great buildings – everything from the Celsus Library at Ephesus to Atatürk International Airport – set in manicured lawns dotted with fake rocks blasting a distorted recording of the national anthem. Children aren't interested in the models but love the miniature train that traverses the paths and the playground equipment. It's tacky and only really interesting as a demonstration of how greatly Turks revere their heritage, even when kitsch-coated.

The museum is a five-minute bus ride

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