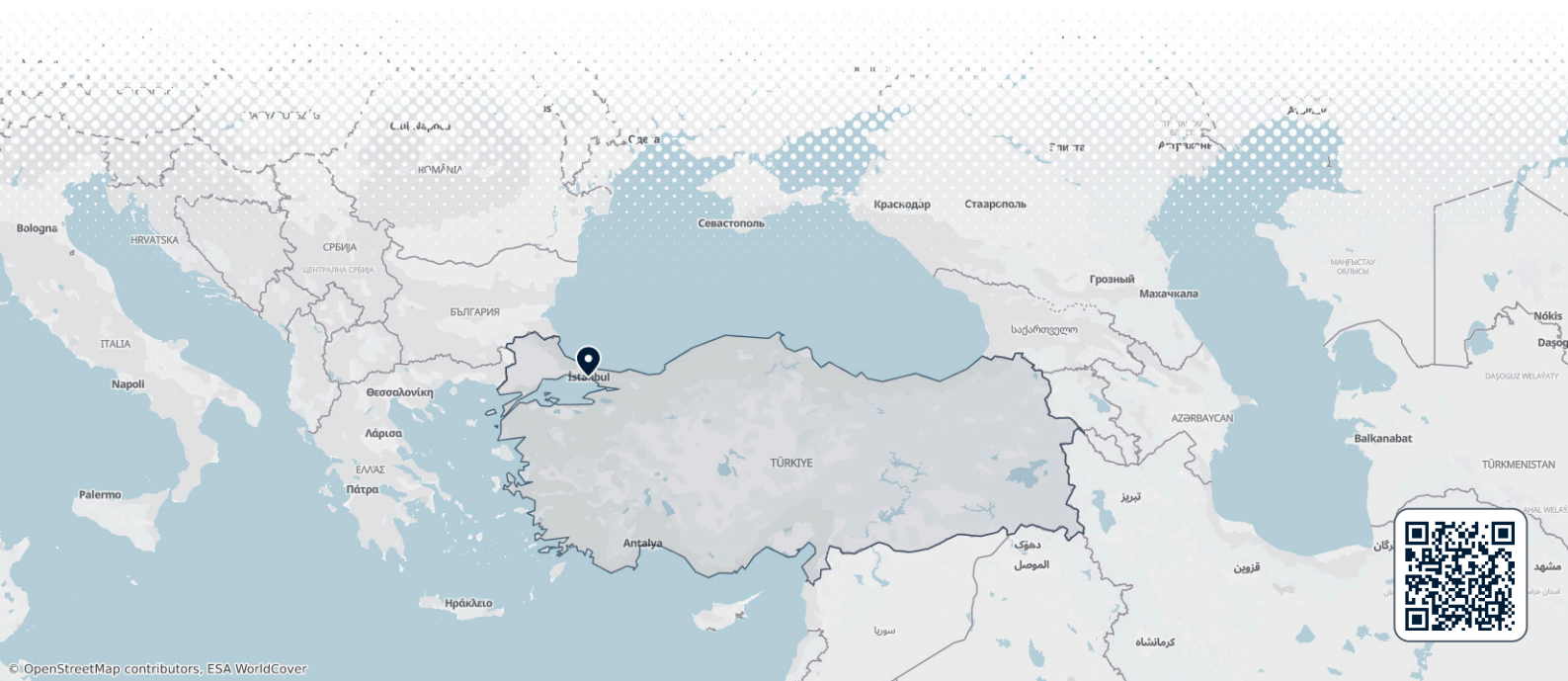




TRAVEL GUIDE



Overview

Istanbul is the only major city in the world split between two continents, with the Bosphorus strait dividing its European and Asian sides. Layers of history sit close together here: Byzantine churches, Ottoman palaces, and modern ferry docks share the same waterfront. It suits travelers who want dense sightseeing packed into a few days, paired with real daily life — commuter ferries, neighborhood tea houses, and a skyline of minarets and domes.

The city was also home to Nobel Prize-winning novelist *Orhan Pamuk*.

When to visit

Spring and autumn are mild and the easiest seasons for sightseeing. Summer turns hot and muggy, and winter is cold and rainy with occasional snow.

Plan around the Istanbul Tulip Festival in April, when city parks fill with millions of tulips and the weather is already turning pleasant.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	● Poor	8° / 14° Feels like 4°	4° / -2°	☔ 14 rainy days · Dry air
February	● Poor	9° / 15° Feels like 4°	4° / -1°	☔ 13 rainy days · Dry air
March	● Poor	11° / 17° Feels like 7°	5° / 1°	☔ 12 rainy days · Dry air
April	● Good	15° / 21° Feels like 12°	9° / 4°	Dry air
May	● Great	20° / 25°	13° / 9°	Dry air
June	● Great	25° / 29°	18° / 15°	Humid air
July	● Great	28° / 32°	21° / 18°	☀ 23 sunny days · Muggy, humid air
August	● Great	28° / 31°	22° / 19°	☀ 22 sunny days · Muggy, humid air
September	● Great	24° / 28°	18° / 14°	
October	● Great	19° / 24°	14° / 9°	Dry air
November	● Fair	15° / 20° Feels like 12°	10° / 5°	Dry air
December	● Poor	11° / 16° Feels like 6°	6° / 1°	☔ 14 rainy days · Dry air

Best months: May, June, July, August, September, October

Climate data: NASA POWER + Copernicus ERA5-Land and ERA5 · 1996–2025

Top sights

Istanbul's old town, Sultanahmet, holds the highest concentration of sights within walking distance of each other.

A [Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque](#) was built as a cathedral under Emperor *Justinian* in 537, later became a mosque, and its vast dome and gold mosaics still dominate the skyline.

Facing it across the square, **B Blue Mosque** is known for the blue Iznik tiles lining its interior and its six minarets.

C Topkapı Palace was the residence of Ottoman sultans for centuries, and its courtyards, treasury, and harem quarters give a close look at royal life on the same hilltop.

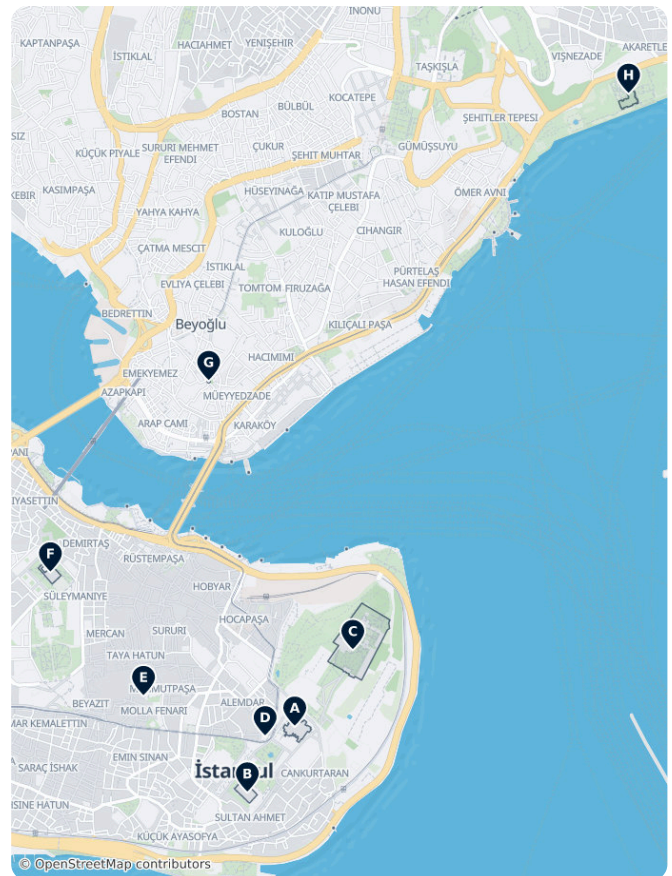
Underneath the streets nearby, **D Yerebatan Cistern** is a sixth-century underground reservoir with rows of columns rising out of shallow water.

E Grand Bazaar is one of the world's oldest covered markets, with thousands of shops selling carpets, ceramics, and jewelry under vaulted stone ceilings. Nearby, the Spice Bazaar sells spices, tea, and Turkish delight along the Golden Horn waterfront.

F Süleymaniye Mosque was designed by the Ottoman Empire's most celebrated architect, *Mimar Sinan*, and its hilltop setting gives one of the best views over the Golden Horn.

Across the Golden Horn, **G Galata Tower** is a medieval stone tower with an observation deck looking out over the whole city.

On the European shore of the Bosphorus, **H Dolmabahçe Palace** replaced Topkapı as the seat of the last Ottoman sultans, with a marble facade and an enormous crystal chandelier in its ceremonial hall.



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What to experience

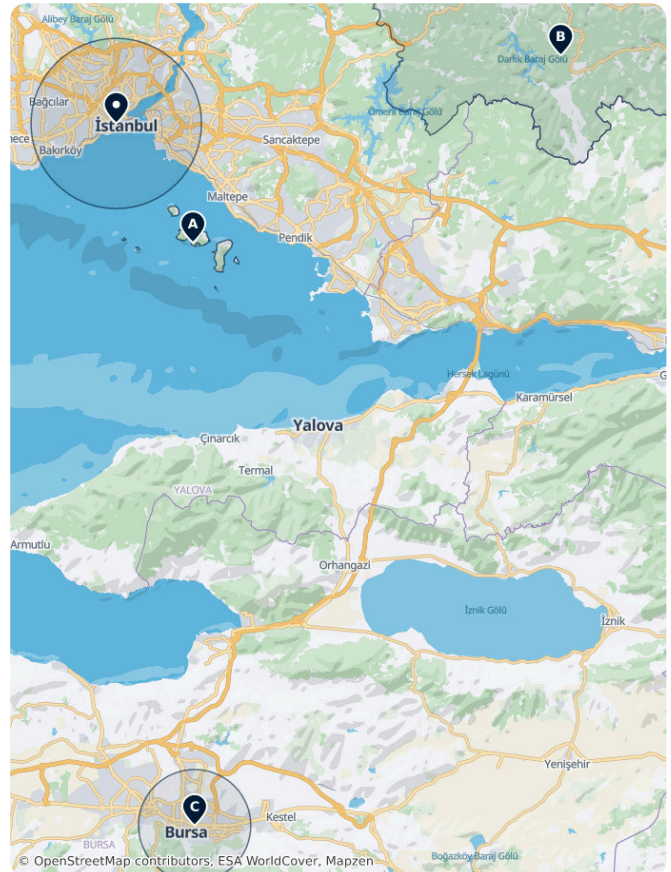
A few things here are worth doing, not just seeing.

- Cross the Bosphorus on a regular public ferry, ideally near sunset, for skyline views that a tour boat charges much more for.
- Get a scrub-and-massage at [Çemberlitaş Hammam](#), a working Ottoman-era hammam rather than a spa built for tourists.
- Watch a whirling dervish (sema) ceremony, held at a few dedicated venues around the city — a Sufi ritual, not a stage show, even though it is now performed for visitors.
- Catch sunset over the whole city from [Big Çamlıca Hill](#), the highest point on the Asian side.

Day trips

Istanbul sits within reach of islands, a Black Sea coast, and a former Ottoman capital for a day away from the city.

- **A** [Princes' Islands](#) — car-free, reached by ferry from Kabataş or Kadıköy in about 1 to 1.5 hours. Pine forests, 19th-century wooden mansions, and no cars — get around by bicycle or electric buggy instead.
- **B** [Şile](#) — a small Black Sea coastal town about 2 hours away by bus or car, with sandy beaches and a 19th-century lighthouse. A slower day away from the crowds.
- **C** [Bursa](#) — the first Ottoman capital, roughly 2.5 hours away by fast ferry across the Sea of Marmara plus a short bus ride, or by direct highway bus. See the Grand Mosque and the silk market, or ride the cable car up Mount Uludağ.



Getting there

- **By air:** Most international flights arrive at Istanbul Airport (IST), on the European side. A taxi to the city center takes about 45 minutes. The M11 metro (connecting to the M2 line) is cheaper, at roughly 1 hour; the Havaist airport bus is cheaper still but slower, typically 1.5 to 2 hours depending on traffic. Some budget and regional flights use Sabiha Gökçen Airport (SAW) on the Asian side, about an hour from the center by bus or taxi.
- **By train:** High-speed YHT trains connect Istanbul to Ankara and other Turkish cities, arriving at Halkalı on the European side or Söğütlüçeşme on the Asian side. Direct international rail service is limited.
- **By bus:** Long-distance coaches from across Turkey and neighboring countries arrive at the Esenler bus terminal (Otogar), with metro and shuttle connections into the center.

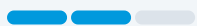
Getting around

- **Public transit:** An Istanbulkart contactless card works on the metro, tram, bus, and ferries, and can be bought and topped up at station kiosks and machines; contactless bank cards are also accepted directly at some gates. Ferries are a normal part of the network, not just a tourist activity, and are often the fastest way to cross between the European and Asian sides.
- **Taxi / ride-hailing:** Metered yellow taxis are everywhere; BiTaksi and Uber both operate and can help avoid meter disputes.
- **On foot / cycling:** The old town and Beyoğlu are walkable but hilly, and distances between neighborhoods are long, so plan to combine walking with ferries or the metro. Cycling is not practical because of traffic and hills.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

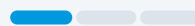
Moderate



Sultanahmet and Beyoğlu are walkable, but Istanbul is large and hilly, and neighborhoods are often far apart, so plan to combine walking with ferries, the metro, or trams.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Low



Heavy traffic, steep hills, and few dedicated bike lanes make cycling impractical for most visitors.

Driving

- **Is a car worth it?:** No. Traffic is heavy, parking is scarce, and ferries and the metro cover the city better than driving. Rent a car only for a day trip destination that trains and buses do not reach easily.
- **Parking:** Paid guarded car parks (otopark) are common in central districts; street parking is metered in some areas and hard to find near major sights.
- **Restrictions:** Istiklal Street and Sultanahmet Square are closed to general traffic; heavy congestion, rather than a formal charge, is the main deterrent to driving in the center.

Food & drink

Istanbul's food scene spans Ottoman palace cooking, everyday street food, and a growing wave of contemporary restaurants. Balık ekmek (grilled fish sandwiches) from the boats near [Galata Bridge](#) and simit from street carts are the classic quick bites.

For a sit-down meal, head to the meyhane (tavern) streets of Karaköy or the restaurant-lined backstreets of Kadıköy on the Asian side, both known for meze and grilled fish rather than any single famous address. Tipping in restaurants follows the country norm.

What to eat & drink

BREAKFAST

Simit

A circular, sesame-crust bread sold by street vendors, a common quick breakfast or snack.

LUNCH

Meze

A spread of small cold and hot starters shared at the table, common before the main course.

Pide

A boat-shaped flatbread topped with cheese, meat, or egg, often called Turkish pizza.

DINNER

Kebab · Kebab

Grilled or roasted meat served many ways nationwide, from skewered şiş kebab to sliced döner.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Lahmacun

A thin, crispy flatbread topped with minced meat, herbs, and vegetables, rolled up to eat.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Baklava

Layers of thin pastry filled with chopped nuts and soaked in sweet syrup.

Turkish Delight · Lokum

A soft, gel-like sweet flavored with rosewater, citrus, or nuts, often dusted with powdered sugar.

DRINKS

Turkish Tea · Çay

Strong black tea served in small tulip-shaped glasses, drunk throughout the day.

Turkish Coffee · Türk Kahvesi

Finely ground coffee simmered unfiltered, served in small cups with the grounds settled at the bottom.

Ayran

A savory, salted yogurt drink served cold, a common accompaniment to grilled meat.



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the app

Safety & health

Istanbul is generally safe for tourists, with low rates of violent crime. The most common problems are petty ones:

- Taxi meter disputes — insist on the meter, or use an app like BiTaksi or Uber to avoid it.
- Overpriced bars and restaurants near Sultanahmet and Taksim that add unrequested extras to the bill — check the total before paying.
- Friendly strangers near tourist sites offering unsolicited tours or shoe shines that lead to a payment demand — politely decline and walk on.

History

Legend credits the city's founding to *Byzas*, a Greek colonist who settled the site as Byzantium in the 7th century BC. Emperor *Constantine* refounded it as Constantinople in 330 AD, and it served as the capital of the Byzantine Empire for over a thousand years — [Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque](#) was built during this period as the world's largest cathedral of its day. In 1453, Sultan *Mehmed II* captured the city after a long siege, ending the Byzantine Empire and beginning nearly 500 years as the Ottoman capital. The sultans ruled from [Topkapı Palace](#) for centuries before moving to the more modern [Dolmabahçe Palace](#) in the 1850s. The city was renamed Istanbul in the early 20th century after the founding of the Turkish Republic, when the capital moved to Ankara. Near the [Theodosian Walls](#), the Chora Church holds some of the best-preserved Byzantine mosaics in the city, added almost 800 years after Hagia Sophia was built, in the early 1300s.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Turkey at a glance:

 CURRENCY

TRY ₺

 EMERGENCY

112

 ELECTRICITY



Type C / Type F
230 V · 50 Hz

 LANGUAGES

Turkish

 TAP WATER

Use caution

Istanbul's Absolute Essentials

Istanbul's historic peninsula preserves layers of Byzantine and Ottoman history through its most significant landmarks. This selection features iconic architectural sites like the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque, alongside the expansive Topkapı Palace complex. The list also highlights Roman engineering with the Column of Constantine and the Column of the Goths, as well as the city's traditional bathing culture found in historic structures like the 16th-century Haseki Hürrem Hammam and the Baroque-style Cağaloğlu Hamam.



A Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque

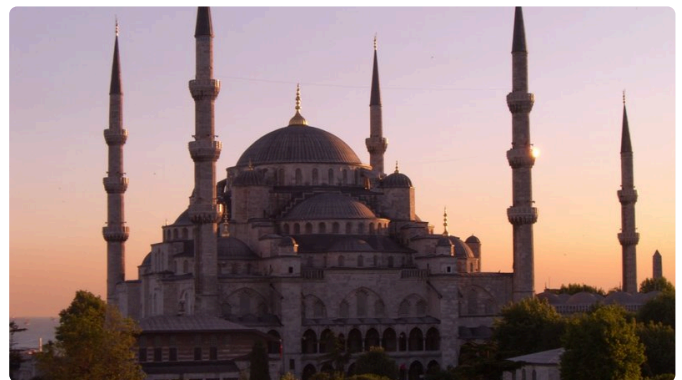
Historic architectural masterpiece that has served as a church, mosque, and museum, renowned for its Byzantine architecture and cultural significance.



Ayasofya Meydanı 1, 34122 İstanbul (41.00860, 28.97983)

Mo–Su 09:00–19:30

muze.gen.tr/muze-detay/ayasofya, +90 212 522 1750



B Blue Mosque

Historic Ottoman mosque known for its six minarets and intricate blue tile interior decoration. It is an active place of worship and a significant example of Ottoman architecture.



Atmeydanı Caddesi 7, 34122 İstanbul (41.00536, 28.97673)

Mo–Su 08:30–12:15, 14:00–16:45, 17:45–18:30

geziyerler.com/sultan-ahmet-camii, +90 212 518 1319



C Topkapı Palace

Historic Ottoman palace and former royal residence featuring centuries-old architecture and extensive imperial collections, now functioning as a museum and UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Cankurtaran Mh., 34122 Istanbul, Turkey
(41.01238, 28.98362)

Mo-Su

09:30-15:30

muze.gen.tr

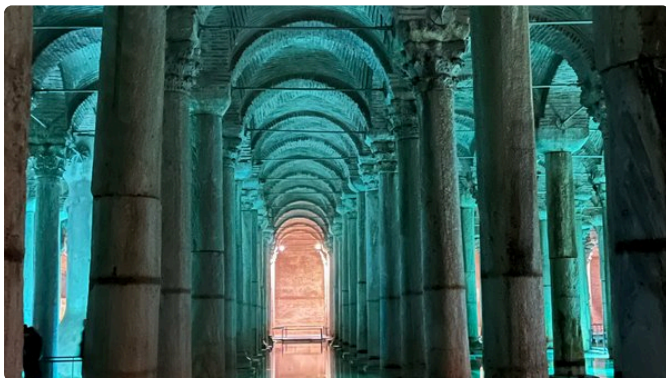


D Sultan Ahmet Square

Historic square featuring notable monuments and remnants of an ancient sports and social center. It reflects both Byzantine and Ottoman architectural influences.

6 At Meydanı Caddesi, Fatih 34122, Turkey
(41.00621, 28.97566)

ktb.gov.tr/EN-113785/sultanahmet-blue-mosque.html



E Cistern of Philoxenos

Byzantine underground cistern featuring 224 columns and notable Byzantine architecture. It serves as an archaeological site and museum showcasing ancient water storage engineering.

İmran Öktem Cad.Binbirdirek Mah., Sultanahmet/Fatih,
Istanbul, Turkey (41.00761, 28.97442)

binbirdirek.com, +905332041001



F New Mosque

Completed in the 17th century, this large mosque features 66 domes, a nice courtyard and two minarets.

Bankacılar 1 (41.01689, 28.97278)





G Column of Constantine

There used to be a statue of Constantine the Great atop of this Roman column.

2/1 Vezirhanı Caddesi, Fatih 34120, Turkey
(41.00854, 28.97130)



H Camondo Stairs

This famous stairway was built around 1880 by a wealthy man named Abraham Salomon Camondo. It mixes Neo-Baroque and early Art Nouveau styles.

13 Bereketzade Medresesi Sokak, Beyoğlu 34421, Turkey
(41.02397, 28.97378)

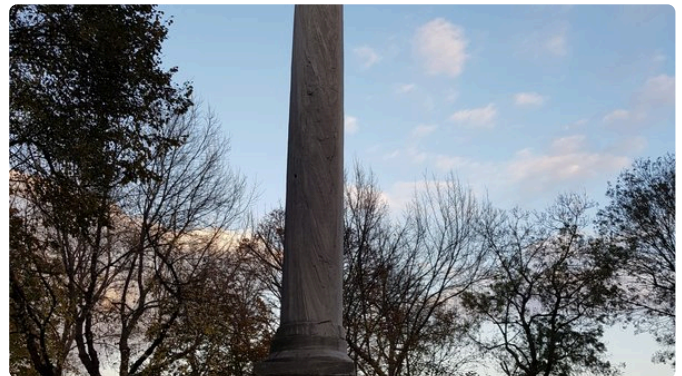


I Hagia Irene

This former Eastern Orthodox church is part of the Topkapı Palace complex. The name Hagia Irene means "Divine Peace".

İstanbul (41.00984, 28.98118)

muze.gen.tr



J Column of the Goths

A 15-meter-high Roman triumphal column made of Proconnesian marble, located in Gülhane Park. Dating from the 3rd or 4th century, it commemorates a Roman victory over invading Goths and remains one of the oldest intact monuments from the Roman era in the city.

İstanbul (41.01464, 28.98568)





K Nuruosmaniye Mosque

The Nuruosmaniye Mosque is an 18th-century Ottoman mosque located in the Çemberlitaş neighbourhood of Fatih district in Istanbul, Turkey,...

20 Çarşıkapı Nur-u Osmaniye Caddesi, Fatih 34120, Turkey
(41.01038, 28.97035)



L Golden Horn

This 7.5 kilometers long natural bay has served as a harbor for centuries.

40/1A Fermeneciler Caddesi, Beyoğlu 34421, Turkey
(41.02174, 28.97322)



M Sultan Ahmed III Fountain

The Fountain of Sultan Ahmed III is a fountain in the great square in front of the Imperial Gate of Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, Turkey.

2 Soğuk Çeşme Sokak, Fatih 34122, Turkey
(41.00825, 28.98126)



N Haseki Hürrem Hammam

The Hagia Sophia Hurrem Sultan Bathhouse is a sixteenth-century Turkish bath in Istanbul, Turkey.

2 Kabasakal Caddesi, Fatih 34122, Turkey
(41.00695, 28.97886)

ayasofyahamami.com





Cağaloğlu Hamam

The Cağaloğlu Hamam is a historic hamam in Sultanahmet, in the heart of the historic centre of Istanbul, Turkey.

Prof. Kazım İsmail Gürkan Cad. No: 24 Cağaloğlu, İstanbul, Turkey (41.01070, 28.97571)

cagalogluhamami.com.tr, +90 212 522 2423



Çemberlitaş Hammam

When going to or from the Grand Bazaar, stop by at this amazing hammam. They offer various treatments such as scrubbing or Sultan's bath.

Vezirhanı Caddesi 8, 34440 (41.00854, 28.97162)

Mo-Su

06:00-23:30

cemberlitashamami.com, +90 212 522 7974



Tiled Kiosk

The Tiled Kiosk is a pavilion set within the outer walls of Topkapı Palace and dates from 1472 as shown on the tile inscript above the main...

34122 (41.01208, 28.98113)

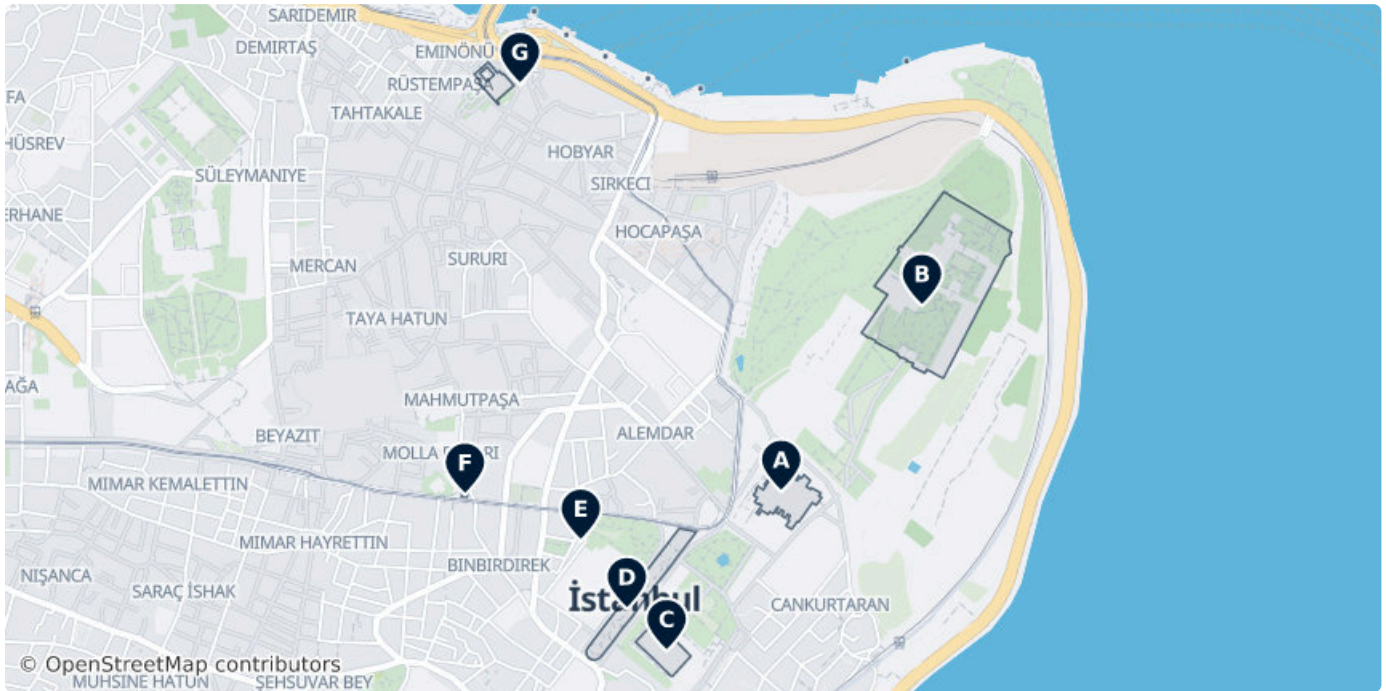
Tu-Su

09:00-19:00



Istanbul's Historical Treasures

Istanbul's historical core is defined by a layer of Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman architecture. This collection spans centuries, featuring the Hagia Sophia's iconic dome and the expansive Topkapı Palace complex. It highlights the city's religious heritage through the Blue Mosque and the 17th-century New Mosque. Ancient civic engineering is visible at the subterranean Cistern of Philoxenos and the Column of Constantine, while Sultan Ahmet Square preserves the layout of the Roman-era Hippodrome and its monumental obelisks.



A Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque

Historic architectural masterpiece that has served as a church, mosque, and museum, renowned for its Byzantine architecture and cultural significance.

Ayasofya Meydanı 1, 34122 İstanbul (41.00860, 28.97983)

Mo-Su

09:00-19:30

muze.gen.tr/muze-detay/ayasofya, +90 212 522 1750



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Cankurtaran Mh., 34122 İstanbul, Turkey (41.01238, 28.98362)

Mo-Su

09:30-15:30

muze.gen.tr





C Blue Mosque

Historic Ottoman mosque known for its six minarets and intricate blue tile interior decoration. It is an active place of worship and a significant example of Ottoman architecture.



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geziyerler.com/sultan-ahmet-camii, +90 212 518 1319



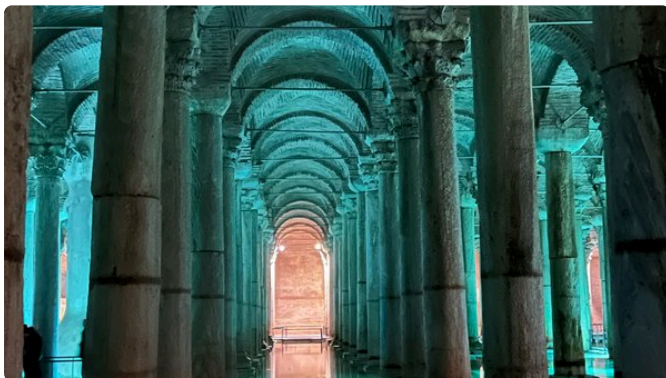
D Sultan Ahmet Square

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ktb.gov.tr/EN-113785/sultanahmet-blue-mosque.html



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binbirdirek.com, +905332041001



F Column of Constantine

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2/1 Vezirhanı Caddesi, Fatih 34120, Turkey (41.00854, 28.97130)



New Mosque

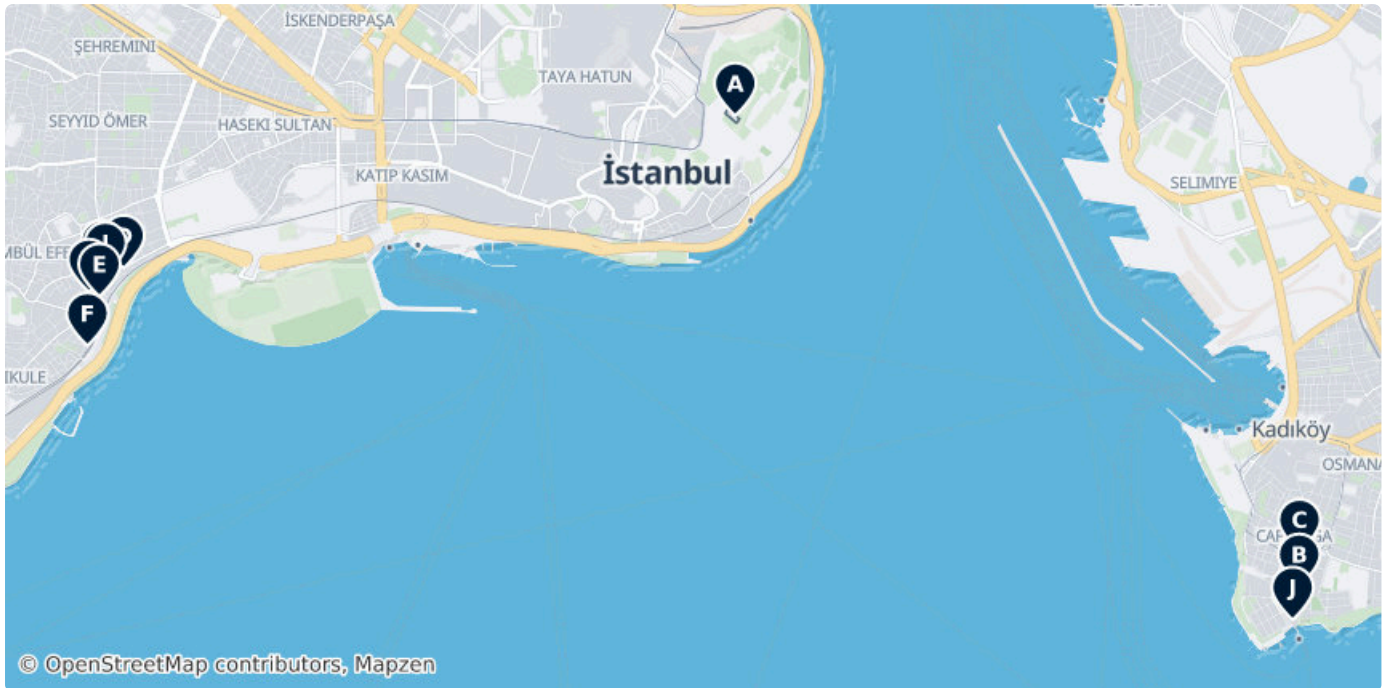
Completed in the 17th century, this large mosque features 66 domes, a nice courtyard and two minarets.



Bankacilar 1 (41.01689, 28.97278)

Historic Christian Churches

Istanbul's Christian heritage is preserved in its diverse collection of churches across both the European and Asian sides. This list features Hagia Irene, the city's oldest surviving Byzantine church, alongside 19th-century structures in the Moda and Samatya districts. These sites represent various denominations, including Greek Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, and Presbyterian traditions, showcasing architectural styles ranging from Byzantine brickwork to neo-Gothic designs.



A Hagia Irene

This former Eastern Orthodox church is part of the Topkapı Palace complex. The name Hagia Irene means "Divine Peace".

İstanbul (41.00984, 28.98118)

muze.gen.tr



B All Saints Moda English Church

Built in 1878 following the Crimean War, this small Anglican church features neo-Gothic elements and serves the English-speaking community in Kadıköy.

8 Yusuf Kamil Paşa Sokak, Kadıköy 34710, Turkey
(40.98209, 29.02522)

allsaintsmoda.net



C Church of the Assumption

A mid-19th-century French Catholic church located in the Moda neighborhood, serving the local Catholic community.

5 Cem Sokak, Kadıköy 34710, Turkey (40.98414, 29.02525)

**D Aya Yorgi Rum Kilisesi**

A Greek Orthodox church in the Samatya district dedicated to Saint George, representing the area's long-standing Orthodox heritage.

8 Büyük Kuleli Sokak, Fatih 34098, Turkey (41.00086, 28.93340)

**E Aya Nikola Rum Kilisesi**

A Greek Orthodox church in Samatya dedicated to Saint Nicholas, serving as a focal point for the local community in the Fatih district.

(40.99919, 28.93151)

**F Samatya Church**

Also known as the Church of St. George of Samatya, this site has a long history transitioning from Byzantine origins to an Armenian Orthodox place of worship.

(40.99630, 28.93058)

**G Aya Mina Rum Ortodoks Kilisesi**

A 19th-century Greek Orthodox church dedicated to Saint Menas, constructed over the foundations of an earlier Byzantine structure in Samatya.

(41.00056, 28.93170)

**H Ermeni Katolik Kilisesi**

An Armenian Catholic church in the Samatya neighborhood, reflecting the religious diversity and 19th-century expansion of the local Armenian community.

35 Pulcu Sokak, Fatih 34098, Turkey (40.99946, 28.93068)

**I Kaymina Rum Kilisesi**

A Greek Orthodox church located in the historic Samatya district, contributing to the dense cluster of religious sites in the Fatih area.

4 Bestekar Hakkı Sokak, Fatih 34098, Turkey (41.00044, 28.93198)

**J The Spring of St. Catherine**

An Orthodox sacred spring and place of worship in Moda, traditionally visited for its holy water and associated with Saint Catherine.

171 Moda Caddesi, Kadıköy 34710, Turkey (40.98014, 29.02471)



DATA SOURCES

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