

SUMMER ISTANBUL

History, hedonism and alfresco exotica – Turkey's top city gets hot in the sunshine



Now's the best time to be in Istanbul – the temperature is T-shirt, the broad Bosphorus strait is blue, its shorefront districts abuzz with fish restaurants, clubs and cafes on both the European and Asiatic sides. By day, the shadowy old quarters offer up curiosity shops and architectural relics of past centuries. Then, when night falls and a moon hangs over the waters, the party starts...

By Nick Redman



WHAT TO SEE & DO

● Where the Golden Horn creek idles into the Bosphorus, the old home of the Ottoman sultans sprawls over a promontory – Topkapı Palace (www.topkapisarayi.gov.tr; £8; Harem £6; ① on map) is all domes, priceless porcelain displays, **secret summer houses** and **emerald lawns**. It's the perfect first-day immersion into this ancient city.

● Across the Golden Horn, in Karaköy, is art gallery and discreet architectural wonder Istanbul Modern (Meclis-i Mebusan Cad; www.istanbulmodern.org; £4.75, free 10am–2pm Thurs; ②). The pale, sedative halls are a fine retreat from the heat, but the main pull is the concrete-chic cafe, with unparalleled **wide-angle terrace views back across the waters to the great skyline icons**: Topkapı, Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque, shimmering like holograms.

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WHERE TO STAY

Hotellino (Nöbethane Cad 5; 00 90 212 513 1212, www.hotellinoistanbul.com; 9). In the Old City, attractive budget hotels are as common as monogamous Sultans. So hats off to Hotellino: 23 rooms of easy-on-the-eye grey, olive and white tones in normally uninspiring Sultanahmet. Doubles from €93, B&B.

Miopera Hotel (Meşrutiyet Cad 34; 00 90 212 245 0245, www.mioperahotel.com; 10). It's IdentiKea-trendy, with some fairly pinched rooms, but it's perfect for night owls exploring after-dark Beyoğlu. Doubles from €105, B&B.

The House Hotel Galatasaray (Bostanbaşı Cad 19; 00 90 212 244 3400, www.thehousehotel.com; 11). The HH brand has cornered the (mid-)market in design-hotels-with-character. This one occupies an ornate, pastel-facaded mansion on a backstreet in boho Cukurcuma, down from Beyoğlu. It has a fab roof-view bar, with fireplace. Doubles from €131, B&B.



Witt Istanbul Hotel (Defterdar

Yokuşu 26; 00 90 212 293 1500, www.wittistanbul.com; 12). Smart weekenders love this apartment conversion-into-suites – a great base for Beyoğlu and leafy Cihangir district. They have glossy kitchens, so you can cook. As if. Doubles from €158, B&B.

Palazzo Donizetti (Asmalı Mescit Sok 55; 00 90 212 249 5151, www.palazzodonizetti.com; 13). In 19th-century Istanbul, foreigners clamoured

to live in Pera (now Beyoğlu), and this new hotel honours the eponymous Italian composer who resided in this street – hence the Italianate marble lobby and corporate-but-classy Neo-Classical rooms. Doubles from €168, B&B.

Pera Palace Hotel (Meşrutiyet Cad 52; 00 90 212 377 4000, www.perapalace.com; 14). A recent refurb sought to revive this *grande dame*, first unveiled in 1895 and patronised by the likes of Greta Garbo and Agatha Christie. The rooms are, hand on heart, bland, but you'll love the restored 'birdcage' lift and the exotic Domed Salon where they serve a superb afternoon tea. Doubles from €229, B&B.



WHERE TO EAT

Karaköy Lokantası (Kemankeş Cad 37A; 00 90 212 292 4455, www.karakoylokantasi.com; 15). Stick to a quick beer with Bosphorus view at the tourist traps of the Galata Bridge – this blue-tiled neo-taverna nearby is much more like it. Point to dishes (they do a delicious yoghurt aubergine salad), and eat them with the regulars at wobbly tables out in the alley. Mains around €6.

Münferit (Yeni Carsı Cad 19; 00 90 212 252 5067; 16). All too often meze – those trays of traditional shared starters – go hand-in-hand with old (and iffy) premises. So, for Istanbul, Münferit is ingenious, updating dishes (try the fava beans with mint) in smart slate-and-timber environs. Sexy outside table scene, too. Mains around €13.

Modern tastes: from left, seared squid and black couscous, as served at Münferit; interiors at The House Hotel Galatasaray layer trend on tradition

Maya (Kemankeş Cad 35A; 00 90 212 252 6884, www.lokantamaya.com; 17). They've hipped-up Turkish staples at this favourite near Galata Bridge – warm goat's cheese works a treat with caramelised onions and almonds. The homey bookcases tempt you to linger longer after dinner. Mains around €13.

Bird (Meşrutiyet Cad 103; 00 90 212 245 7085, <http://birdistanbul.com>; 18). The one they're flocking to is a vibrant hybrid cafe/restaurant, all mirrors, marble and palm fronds. Arrive with the lunchers, stay for the dinners, and end up with the cocktail-swillers. Mains around €16.



Mimolett (Siraselviler Cad 55/A; 00

90 212 245 9858, www.mimolett.com.tr; 19). Chef-star Murat Bozok packs them into this chandeliered downtown restaurant in the grind of Taksim, delivering unexpected little flavour bursts: Turkish mountain thyme in the goat's cheese, and a wild sea bass tasting of the ocean. Mains around €22.

X Restaurant (IKSV Deniz Palas, Sadi Konuralp Cad 5; 00 90 212 244 7101, www.xrestaurantbar.com; 20). Food was so-so on this visit (the four-cheese dumplings were deep-fried to death) but the view was special, over a moonlit Golden Horn to domed, spired Hagia Sophia, like a giant celebratory cake with candles. Mains around €24. >



● Taxi to Emirgan, where the white-on-white Sakıp Sabancı Museum (<http://muze.sabanci.univ.edu>; £1.20; ③) peeks through evergreens at the Bosphorus below. The **Turkish art and riotous Ottoman calligraphy is stunning**, but you're here for sun-on-arms lazing. Order halloumi in vine leaves at Müzedechange in the grounds – with insects murmuring, and the blue view, you could be on an island out to sea.

● The indolent fish meal is a noble Istanbul-weekend pastime. Kill two birds (fabulous food, no tourists) with one stone at restaurant-with-roof terrace Eftalya (Arnavutköy 1 Cad 32; 00 90 212 287 2520, www.eftalya.net; mains around £21; ④). It's in the village-suburb of Arnavutköy, where **gingerbread-trim homes gaze on moored boats**. Fish dishes are first-rate: any day soon they'll have tasty seasonal sardines, plucked from the waters as they swim from the Black Sea to the Marmara.

● The ferry is to Istanbul what the red bus is to London – equal parts picture-postcard and practical. Board the classic yellow-funnelled variety for a 20-minute hop across the Bosphorus from Eminönü jetty (⑤), below Topkapı Palace, to Kadıköy on the Asiatic shore. Here, **wander the tea gardens, and smoke cherry-scented water pipes until dusk** and the ferry back. Timetables at www.ido.tr.

● In the heat of the night, when only a Mojito will save you, head into Asmalimescit – the nocturnal tangle of alleys centred on Sofyalı, Asmalı Mescit and Sehbender streets in Beyoğlu. **Lanterns glow and taverna tables spill along streets**. Kick off (10ish) at 11 Leblon (General Yazgan Sok, Tünel Geçidi İş Hanı 3/A; ⑥) and let the cocktail currents carry you...

● On which note, summer carousing under night skies is a sacred (and profane) rite. Places

Gilt complex: opposite, the Topkapı Palace is all gold leaf and intricate tilework, top right; above, from left, drink in the streets of Asmalimescit after dark – heaven for summer bar-hoppers; the Sea of Marmara beyond the spiky minarets of Sultanahmet

wax and wane but supper-club AngeliQue (Muallim Nacı Cad, Salhane Sok 5; 00 90 212 327 2844, www.istanbuldoors.com; ⑦) rocks on. By the waters in Ortaköy, it's **dinner-and-DJs in a mansion until late – or later**.

● Clear your Sunday head on the deck of a ferry to the Princes' Islands, departing Kabataş jetty (90 mins, £1.20; timetables as before; ⑧). In Ottoman times the wealthy poured money into fancy villas, and you can wander between them free from cars. Best moment is atop Büyükkada, 'big island', where a tiny Greek Orthodox church sits among foliage – **the late-afternoon sun turns the distant city into a smudge**, and the Sea of Marmara metallic. >