

# Maraba from Istanbul

The joyful and delightful city where East and West meet



The Spice Bazaar.



Traffic of people in Istanbul city streets.

Confused where to go for a break? Europe or Asia? Istanbul is the answer. Think no further and book for yourself a three days short trip to the city where East meets West or West meets East. A joyful city that may be visited more than once and always delightful in winter as well as in summer. Istanbul is a destination I started visiting at an early age with my father for his carpets' orders and collection of silk on silk Hereke fine rugs. For him, it was another business trip whereas it was an eye opening for me, experiencing old bazaars, loud voices, traffic

of people, smell of leather and numerous carpets, while enjoying the lovely food & drinking lost of teas. Very quickly, I came to love this city and I started appreciating its art: all about carpets and textiles of course and its culture and all extras that come with it, like its music, its language and its habits, especially the traditional tea and the Loukoum turkish delights served everywhere. In fact, one will learn that we, in Lebanon, have a lot of similarities with the turkish city, while being also distinctive in many ways at the same time.

Sultahmet Square, the most visited place, is one of the top Istanbul attractions, rich with its architectural and artistic sights.

## Touristic sights and Top Istanbul attractions:

Istanbul, the Ottoman Empire, the history, the architecture... I will state the most visited sights and most written about in history. Once should start at the Sultahmet Square, where it's impossible not to notice this beautiful picture of Hagia Sophia, Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace all next to each other.

### 1. Topkapi Palace Museum

One of the most outstanding and popular places to visit in Istanbul is Topkapi Palace, the symbolic and political centre of the Ottoman Empire between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It stands on the tip of the land where the Golden Horn, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus come together, and where is a maze of buildings centered around a series of courtyards, typical of Islamic tradition and unlike any European Palace, its architecture is predominantly Middle Eastern in character. Other highlights in the Palace are the Spoonmaker's diamond (the fourth largest diamond in the world), a vast collection of paintings and miniatures, the precious gifts of head of States: Persian Shahs to the Sultans. [www.topkapisarayi.gov.tr](http://www.topkapisarayi.gov.tr)

### 2. Hagia Sophia Museum (Ayasofya)

Hagia Sophia, which is considered as one of the eight wonders of the world, also occupies a prominent place in the history of art and architecture. It is one of the rare works of this size and age that has survived till our day. The church (called Ayasofya in Turkish) is erroneously known as Saint Sophia in the West. It served for 916 years as a church and 481 years as a mosque since its year of construction. Hagia Sophia was turned into a museum in 1935.

### 3. Dolmabahçe Palace

Built in the reign of Sultan I Abdulmecit during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this over-ornate palace lies along the European coast of the Bosphorus. The palace with its 285 chambers and 43 halls, has a level of luxury not present in most other palaces, with walls and ceilings decorated with gold, and European art from the period. Of course, my main interest and fascination is the top quality silk and wool carpets mainly from the Hereke area that adorn every room.

### 4. Grand Bazaar

The Grand Bazaar in the old city is the logical place to start ones turkish familiarity. Charming souvenirs and gifts can be selected from among turkish crafts, Kelims and Halis (carpets in Turkish), gold jewellery, brilliant handpainted ceramics, the traditional Izmic with the ottoman tulip «Laleh», leather good, felt accessories. (Not to miss near it the Spice Bazaar).



Garden of Ceregan Palace facing Bosphorus.



Istanbul view.



New ceramic kaftans.

### 5. Blue Mosque (Sultan Ahmet Mosque)

It's one of the largest of Istanbul's structures, the complex includes a mosque, the sultan's chamber, shops of tradesmen, a hamam, a public fountain with a spout and a primary school. The complex was built (1609-1617) by the architect Mehmet Aga for Sultan Ahmet I. The mosque is located in the centre of the complex and referred to as «Blue Mosque» on account of the roughly 20,000 blue glazed tiles that covered its exterior.

### 6. Istanbul Modern Museum

Istanbul Modern, the first private museum devoted to modern and contemporary art in Turkey, was founded in 2004. Located beside the Bosphorus, the museum houses the production of arts ranging from painting, sculpture and photography to video and new media. As a matter of fact, auctions and exhibitions of various paintings are taking place all around the year, always pleasant and interesting to view, mainly in 5 stars hotels like the Swiss Hotel.▶



Working on a custom-made carpet.



Learning to make a knot.



Kelims and Halis Bazaar.

Grand Bazaar is a must for both shopping and sightseeing for Izmic tiles and carpets.

**How to spend your «Liras» in Istanbul not in Beirut**

Shopping is very tempting in Istanbul for local shops, bric-à-brac and brand names:

Shopping and sightseeing come hand in hand in Istanbul around Sultanahmet Square in the old city. The Bazaar area, Nurosmanieh cedessi, Arasta Bazaar and the Sultanahmet Mosque shopping arcade. As mentioned before, Grand Bazaar is a must for both shopping and sightseeing for Izmic tiles, spices, fur or leather coats, carpets, antique falamank jewellery. The following names are among the shopping areas highly recommended for all shopaholic and fashionista ladies and gents. «Nisantasi» pronounced «neshantashi» for high-end brands specifically available in Beymen, the sector leader in luxury retail. Kanyon in Levent is another interesting mall, where you can also browse Harvey Nichols and lunch at my favorite Wagamama. Istinyeh Park is a must, with its splendid outdoor cafés. Akaratler new shopping area with all high end brands as well, close to W hotel. Istiklal Street starts with the Taksim square, with beautiful cafés and restaurants, glamorous churches and synagogues like Hagia-Triada, Saint-Antoine, Sainte-Maria. You can wonder around in affordable various shops and discover antique shops in hidden streets of Cukurcuma, and have a taste of the turkish coffee, you'll be surprised because it is pretty different than our «lebanese» turkish coffee. Galata Tower is another spot to check next to Taksim square and Istiklal Caddesi. ▶

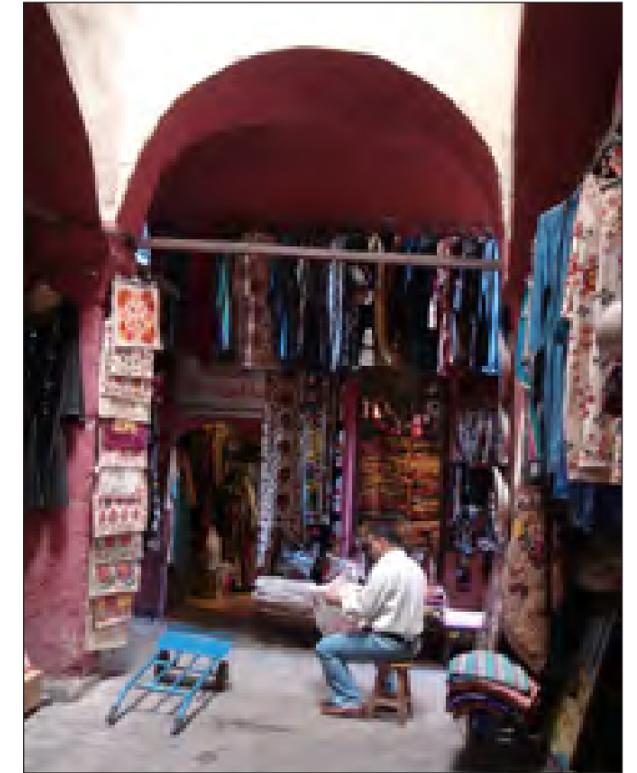


Carpet repairer.

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Shopping in the closed bazaar.



One of the shops in the grand bazaar.

Shopping is very tempting in Istanbul for local shops, beautiful cafés and restaurants.

**Where to stay from budget to 5 stars and boutique hotels:**

All international chains are available, however I would like to suggest few: Pierrelotti budget hotel walking distance to Grand Bazaar and Sultaehmed, the impressive Ceragan Palace Kempinski hotel, as well as the Four Seasons both on Bosphorus. Plus the Four Seasons on Sultanahmet that used to serve as a prison in the old days, the Yesil Ev boutique hotel on Sultanehmet, next to Arasta Bazaar, the Witt hotel in Cihangir which is currently the place to be seen, to shop and to dine out and the Sumahan boutique hotel «on the water» facing the Bosphorus.

**Unusual restaurants:**

Ulus 29,360, Rena, Leb-I Derya, Ciya restaurant in Kadikoy and restaurants around the Fish market. And if you're on the go, do not miss the «donor kabab» the turkish fast food, the local meza, the «nar» Pomegranate juice and «Elma Cayi» for an apple tea. All in all, visiting Istanbul is indeed an enriching experience, you will always find something captivating with an added value. Walking and negotiating in the bazaar, smelling and eating kabab, admiring the architecture, dancing to their oriental music, assisting to the Darwish show, is all a part of the turkish experience. «Istanbul sev», enjoy Istanbul. NIVINE MAKTABI



Eating kabab.



Inside traditional rest at the grand bazaar.

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