

TURKISH DELIGHTS

SHADES OF
SUMMER IN
ISTANBUL

AUGUST 2009

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SPANISH MOD REVIVAL

SCOOT BACK IN TIME
WITH GIJON'S SIXTIES
RETRO REBELS

TAKE TO THE WATER

PUNTING IN FRANCE
AND SCUBA DIVING IN
PEMBROKESHIRE

★ A QUICK GUIDE TO THE CHIC SIDE OF ISTANBUL

IN THE LAST few years Turkey's vibrant capital has gained a reputation for being one of the world's hippest cities. Crumbling Ottoman mansions overlooking the Bosphorus have been converted into five-star hotels and glamorous concert venues such as the impressive Esmâ Palace (www.themarmarahotels.com). But while you can rub shoulders with Europe's glitterati at mega-clubs and on the constantly evolving restaurant scene, as a first-time visitor you should head straight for Sultanahmet to marvel at the vestiges of the Ottoman Empire, which spanned six centuries. This heaving metropolis, which straddles the Asian and European continents, has a population that exceeds 11 million and a road system that is woefully inadequate. To make the most of your visit, plan your movements carefully to avoid the traffic gridlock or hire a guide and driver from Istanbul Daily City Tours (www.istanbuldailycitytours.com) for a stress-free, whistle-stop tour of the major sites. Make the Topkapı Palace (www.topkapisurati.gov.tr) your first port of call to marvel at the command centre of the first sultan of Byzantine Constantinople and his imperial treasury. Then head for the Hagia Sophia (www.hagia-sophia.net), which was the largest cathedral in the world for 1,000 years before becoming a mosque and then a museum. Directly opposite is Istanbul's architectural icon, the stunning 17th-century Sultan Ahmed Mosque, also known as the Blue Mosque because of the intricate *İznik* tiles that line its cavernous interior.

★ ISTANBUL'S DESIGNERS

When you're done with your cultural steeplechase, skip the souks and their tourist tat in favour of the swish boutiques of Nişantaşı shopping district, where you'll find a more sophisticated keepsake. Dilek Hanif's hand-beaded gowns have graced the catwalks of Paris' couture shows for the last three years, but her prêt-à-porter collection, on sale at City's mall (110 Nişantaşı, tel: +90 212 373 2949) is infinitely more wearable and affordable. Round the corner, Özlem Özbay (1 Ahmet Fetğari Sokak, Teşvikiye, tel: +90 212 253 2569) offers cutting-edge, trans-Atlantic looks as every year she stocks up on frocks and accessories by New York's next generation of young designers. Jeweller



Zeynep Erol (Yürba apt 8/3, Atiye Sokak, Teşvikiye, tel: +90 212 261 8177) learned metalwork in Istanbul's famous covered bazaar, and mixes traditional techniques with distinctly contemporary design, creating stunning pieces in silver and green, white and rose gold. Directly opposite her showroom, Arzu Kaprol (Abdi İpekçi Cad 53/2, Atiye Sokak, Nisantasi, tel: +90 212 225 0129) dresses the city's top models, singers and writers in flattering frocks in fuchsia, apple-green and neutral tones. And just a street away, couturier Cengiz Abazoğlu (20/A Abdi İpekçi Street, Teşvikiye, tel: +90 212 296 0659) sells his popular prêt-à-porter collection of flattering, floaty dresses to Istanbul's fashionistas.

★ HOTELS

W Istanbul

Around the corner from Nişantaşı, this achingly hip hotel is the crown jewel of the city's latest regeneration project, the restored 19th-century Row Houses of Akaretler, which now house the exclusive boutiques of high-fashion labels like Jimmy Choo, Marc

Jacobs and Lanvin. All 134 rooms sport oversized leather desks, coloured mood lights and heavenly beds. The pricier ones even have private gardens, terraces and cabanas to attract the more decadent guests. If you'd rather splash your cash on a meal to remember, book a table at Jean-Georges Vongerichten's Spice Market on the hotel's second floor, which is one of the city's most fashionable dining spots. From €200 per night; www.starwoodhotels.com

Witt Istanbul Suites

Ideally located in Cihangir, with its trendy restaurants and bars, this chic pied-à-terre is the perfect base for exploring both Nişantaşı and Sultanahmet. All 17 suites have been furnished by Autoban, Istanbul's hippest architecture firm, and have Carrera marble-clad kitchenettes and bathrooms by British designer Ross Lovegrove. With charming staff and home-cooked breakfasts, it's no wonder this is the hotel of choice for top-drawer media types who often stay for weeks at a time. From €189 per night; www.wittistanbul.com