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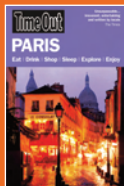
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EDITION

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Introduction

We feel it's best to start this guide with a set of facts that trump the age-old cliché. Istanbul isn't just the bridge between Europe and the Middle East; it's also the largest and – many would argue – most captivating city on both continents. The legacy of its European Capital of Culture 2010 celebrations played out fully in 2011. The year ushered in a volley of new restaurants, a string of new rooftop bars, and a skyline that has been entirely renovated, from the iconic Hagia Sophia to the magnificent Süleymaniye Mosque. If there was ever a city in its prime, it's Istanbul. Right now.

In the same year, Turkey leapt to become the 16th largest economy in the world, sandwiched between the Netherlands and South Korea. (The country boasted the world's fastest growing economy for the first half of 2011.) The trickle-down effect of business patronage on the local cultural scene has been immense. In 2011 Istanbul hosted an art biennial, two international film fairs and several new rock festivals. To put it bluntly, when a city in crisis-hit Europe opens a major art institution, it's headline news. This year Istanbul opened four, including the cultural leviathan SALT Galata, a vast art space overlooking the Bosphorus Straits.

One would be forgiven for thinking that this golden age would make the city crowded, or its citizens complacent. Indeed, it's never been easier – or cheaper – to fly into Atatürk Airport and hop into a taxi for the 20-minute ride downtown. Rest assured, Istanbul is as welcoming and wondrous as it must have been when Emperor Constantine consecrated Constantinople in 330 AD. A case in point is the rambling old Istanbul Archaeology Museum. Its sprawling gardens are home to enough artefacts to make a historian weep, and the museum itself is often empty. The grounds also contain an unexcavated Roman-era hospital in which visitors can play at Indiana Jones in the heart of a vast, head-spinning metropolis. And the thousand-strong list of museums, churches and must-see mosques goes on.

Of course, not everybody visits for cultural immersion. Millions depart the city each year with shopping bags full of Iranian carpets, Syrian spices and Uzbek ceramics from the Grand Bazaar, or perhaps one-off Turkish designs from the chic stores of Nişantaşı. Others depart with bellies full of Michelin starred nouveau Ottoman cuisine, or a blowout seafood and *rakı* feast devoured on the banks of the Bosphorus. Whatever your persuasion, you'll love Istanbul's vibrancy. There are two continents' worth of passion here, after all.

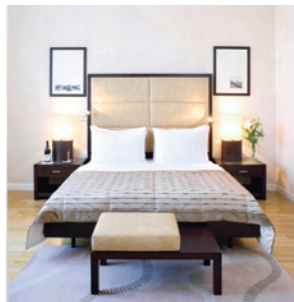
Kathryn Tomasetti and Tristan Rutherford, Editors

Hotels

Hip hotel, loft suite or Ottoman palace by the sea?

A decade ago the Istanbul hotel scene was threadbare. Local flophouses competed with 1970s chains. The city's grande dame hotel, the Pera Palace, lay tired and musty, its ritzy cage lift – the Ottoman Empire's first elevator – a creaky testament to former glories.

But things change fast here. The handful of design hotels that opened in the noughties – including **W**, **Sumahan** and **Tomtom Suites** – inspired a dozen more. Business chic **Edition Hotel** opened in 2011, as did boho Beyoğlu blowout **Le Georges**. A new series of mega hotels pull in big spenders from Europe, the US, Brazil and Asia. The two **Four Seasons** hotels compete with Kempinski's wondrous **Çirağan Palace**, which will both go head-to-head with Istanbul's new **Shangri-La** in 2013. And the **Pera Palace**? After a thorough makeover, it's again adding stars to a gilded guest book that includes Greta Garbo and Jackie O.



WHERE TO STAY

There are basically two choices: in the historic Sultanahmet area south of the Golden Horn, or up the Bosphorus in European Istanbul (the exceptions are the two destination hotels we list on the Asian side, *see p125*). Most tourists who are visiting for a couple of days will head to the former to be near the Grand Bazaar and Topkapı Palace. This area has traditionally been the centre for the city's budget accommodation. Many hotels in Sultanahmet have rooftop terraces and it's hard to beat morning tea and simit bagels nestled between the domes of the Hagia Sophia and Blue Mosque.

To be near the best bars and finest restaurants, find a hotel around Beyoğlu. There are new choices along Meşrutiyet Caddesi such as the newly reopened **Pera Palace** (*see p103*) and **Mia Pera** (*see p105*), as well as the likes of **Tomtom Suites** (*see p107*), **Witt Istanbul** (*see p107*) and **Le Georges** (*see p103*) in the trendy district of Cihangir.

1 Red numbers given in this chapter correspond to the location of each hotel as marked on the street maps. *See pp242-251.*

Most of the city's high-rise, high-end options for business travellers are clustered around Harbiye, an area of green parkland just north of Taksim Square. There's another cluster of hotels around the business district of Levent, including the **Mövenpick** (*see p119*) and new **Edition Hotel** (*see p115*).

Information & prices

Prices quoted in this chapter refer to the rack rates for standard double rooms. These should at least offer an idea about what you can pay at a given hotel, but note that rates can vary wildly throughout the year and even at the same time within a single property, with some hotels charging more for a view. Prices quoted below are high-season rates, which normally apply from the end of May to the start of September, at Christmas and New Year, and during national holidays. Outside these times you can expect a discount of between 10 and 30 per cent. In all but a few of the high-end hotels, room rates include tax (18 per cent) and breakfast.

Almost every hotel in Istanbul now takes reservations online. Indeed, most establishments rely on international booking websites for custom, including www.booking.com, www.laterooms.com and www.expedia.com. There are also a few useful websites for online

heated oval pool – a relaxing and warming hamam-style affair. Massages are available.

Bar. Business centre. Café. Concierge. Gym. Internet (wireless). No-smoking rooms. Parking (free). Pool (indoor). Restaurant. Room service. Spa. TV.

Richmond Hotel

Istiklal Caddesi 227 (0212 252 5460, www.richmondhotels.com.tr). Rates €140-€230 double.

Rooms 103. **Map** p248 M4 **26**

The Richmond is one of the only hotels on Istiklal Caddesi, Beyoğlu's historic main thoroughfare. The hotel may have retained the building's historic façade, but the interior has been ripped out, and rooms underwent a business class makeover in 2010. What the interior lacks in style, the hotel makes up for with a relaxed atmosphere and friendly staff. Standard rooms are simple and streamlined, while the executive suites cater mainly to commercial travellers.

Bars (2). Business services. Café. Concierge. Disabled-adapted rooms. Gym. Internet (wireless). No-smoking rooms. Restaurants (2). Room service. TV.

► *The sleek Leb-i Derya bar-restaurant (see p135) at the Richmond probably has the best view of any of Istanbul's rooftop bars. The central oval bar is a sublime cocktail spot.*

★ Tomtom Suites

*Boğazkesen Caddesi, Tomtom Kaptan Sokak 18 (0212 292 4949, www.tomtomsuites.com). Rates €200-€250 double. Rooms 20. Map p248 N4 **27***

It's the size of Tomtom Suites that's immediately striking. The standard rooms are 35-45sq m (376-484sq ft), and the senior suites 55-65sq m (582-700sq ft). The high ceilings of this converted Franciscan nunnery only add to the impressive proportions. The beds are enormous, and each marble-clad room boasts a jacuzzi bath. Across the road from the old Italian Embassy, Tomtom was restored and repurposed in 2008 with a modern classic design that paired original features with modern artwork and a glass lift, not to mention iPads at each breakfast table. The terrace restaurant and patio has panoramic views over the Golden Horn.

Bar. Business services. Café. Concierge. Disabled-adapted room. Internet (wireless). No-smoking rooms. Restaurant. Room service. TV.

★ Witt Istanbul

Defterdar Yokusu 26, Cihangir (0212 293 1500, www.wittistanbul.com). Rates €169-€499 double.

Rooms 17. **Map** p249 O4 **28**

Designed by famed Turkish architects Autoban, Witt is a deeply impressive suite hotel. Every element has been painstakingly considered, from the open-plan arrangement of the suites to the staff uniforms. The lobby, bar and dining/breakfast areas are low lit, with only black tiles reflecting the light. Suites are as envy-inducing as they are spacious,



Tomtom Suites.

and include a marble kitchenette with sink, kettle, microwave, Nespresso machine and hobs. There is also a seating area, large beds and a desk with an iPod dock. Ross Lovegrove-designed marble bathrooms have five-headed shower units and bespoke towels. Walls are soundproofed. The location is convenient for both the hip cafés along Akarsu Sokak and the antiques shops of Çukurcuma. Simply superb.

Bar. Business services. Café. Concierge. Internet (wireless). No-smoking rooms. Restaurant. Room service. TV.

Moderate

★ 5 oda

Şahkulu Bostan Sokak 164, Galata (0212 252 7501, www.5oda.com). Rates €140 double.

Rooms 5. Map p248 M5 ^{2b}

This new guesthouse, on a quiet street just off Istiklal Caddesi, is perfectly located for the bars and shopping of Beyoğlu. The five rooms are accessed through a reception/kitchen area; a small glass-sided elevator takes you to the upper floors. They are long and airy, with large windows at either side. The architect has used the space well, with an open-plan design that includes a kitchen area with sink, hob, fridge and coffee-making facilities, a couple of chairs and a glass table. With modern design, using wood and white-painted bare brickwork, they are relaxing spaces. Bathrooms are small, with only room for a shower, basin and toilet. Breakfasts, which can be served in guestrooms, are a Turkish spectacular.

★ Eklektik Guest House

Kadriyey Cıkmaşı 4, Galata (0212 243 7446, www.elektikgalata.com). Rates €85-€125 double.

Rooms 8. No credit cards. Map p248 M5 ^{6b}

This thoroughly charming guesthouse, on a quiet cul-de-sac, is popular with gay visitors, but the friendly and knowledgeable staff make everyone feel very welcome. Each of the eight smallish rooms is decorated to a theme: from clean lines, white walls and wood in the Zen Room to drapes and ornate lamps in the Colonial Room, and black linens – and a mirror ball in the bathroom – in the Black Room. The shower in the corner of most rooms is an unconventional touch, but it doesn't seem to bother most patrons, neither does the lack of a lift (and some of the rooms are a hike up several storeys). There is a small terrace with views over the Bosphorus. The breakfast, served around one large table, is superb. *Concierge. Internet (wireless). Parking (TL20 day). Room service. TV.*

► *Eklektik is close to several gay venues, such as the Sugar Café (see p191).*

Galateia Residence

Şahkulu Bostan Sokak 9, Tünel (0212 245 3032, www.galateiaresidence.com). Rates €130-€250 suite.

Rooms 13. Map p248 M4 ³¹

INSIDE TRACK WHY WIFI CHARGES

Istanbul's museums, cafés, restaurants and public areas bask under various free WiFi clouds. Almost every hotel in town offers free internet connections too. However, a handful of naughty big-name hotels still charge for WiFi, even though it costs only around €100 per month to wire up an entire hotel. Among the worst culprits are Four Seasons and Swissôtel, which both charge around €20 per day per device. At either place, toting two laptops and an iPad on your weekend away would add around €120 to your hotel bill.

It's hard to find serviced suites of such size and sumptuousness within striking distance of the Galata Tower. Suites vary inside from capacious 90sqm Junior Deluxe apartments to mammoth 153sqm Bosphorus Duplex flats. All feature walk-in closets, safe, additional beds for guests, fully functioning kitchens and funky bathrooms with Molton Brown products. There's even a concierge on-site, who can arrange restaurant bookings and private shopping trips. Like a hotel, but so much more intimate. *Business services. Concierge. Internet (wireless). Room service. TV.*

House Hotel

Firuzğa Mahallesi, Bostanbaşı Caddesi 19, Çukurcuma (0212 252 0422, www.thehouse-hotels.com). Rates €150-€220 suites.

Rooms 20. Map p248 N4 ^{2c}

This stunning hotel is partly owned by the House Café (see p145) group, and the same sensitive design aesthetic found in the cafés shines through here. It's located in a converted mansion built in 1850, on a quiet street in the Çukurcuma antiques district. Going through the elegant but unassuming entrance, you'll find the original tiled floors and Italian marble staircase. Decor is a subtly modern take on the traditional, with mixed shades of wood adding pattern to parquet flooring, panelled walls painted white and sleek, updated chandeliers. Furnishings in dove grey add a slightly ethereal touch to the white. All the furniture was designed for the hotel by Autoban (also behind the Witt, see p107, and House Café). The bar, on the top floor (bear in mind there are no lifts), has Chesterfield sofas from which to admire views over the Galata Tower. Be aware, however, that both management and reception staff can come across as too cool for school at times. The small lobby makes for chaos at check-out time.

Bar. Café. Concierge. Internet (wireless). Restaurant. Room service. TV.

► *Two larger House Hotels opened in Ortaköy and Nişantaşı in 2010. See the website for details.*