

# OTTOMAN DREAMING

*The foods to try, sights to see, stores to visit, and nightlife to experience—how to spend a weekend getaway in Istanbul*

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ISTANBUL CARESSES THE BOHEMIAN NOMAD'S SOUL WITH AN ARTISTIC BRUSH DIPPED IN OTTOMAN ACCENTS, a bustling cosmopolitan visage, and a stylish night sky that reverberates to the thrilling potency of hookah smoke. Add to this a lyrical vibe that straddles both the ancient Asian and the contemporary European halves of the city, and you have a journey waiting to be traversed. Have only one day and one night in this city, with possibly a breakfast for the morning after? Don't worry; this list should get you well and truly acquainted with Istanbul at its sensual, hypnotic best.

## **GO WITH THE FLOW**

To try and fathom the enigma of this city, you need to befriend the mighty Bosphorus. And there's no better way to do this than by reaching its shores at dawn and simply walking its lower shore-lining passages as you descend from the Galata Bridge. Even the Eminönü ferry docks by the banks of the old peninsula have a similar vibrant collage of experiences at hand. Early morning brings with it an opera of sounds and faces—the sharp wails of ships making their way along one of the world's busiest straits, smaller fishing boats coming in with the day's first catch, fish being grilled in tiny makeshift cafés

and some of the city's oldest restaurants, fishermen bonding over stories of the sea, and a multitude of people slowly arising to the matters of life at hand. Make sure you try a delicious fried fish sandwich with the vast waters of the Bosphorus and strong winds for company.

## **A BREW FOR THE AGES**

Turkey and coffee are synonymous with one another, and Istanbul's riveting areas of Galata, Beyoğlu, Cihangir, Taksim, and Nişantaşı are filled to the brim with coffee parlours both ancient and chic (notwithstanding the jarring infiltration of American coffee chains). It is in Beyoğlu's Karaköy neighbourhood that you'll find Karabatak, one of the most compelling coffeehouses in the world. Named after the symbolic bird of Istanbul, the café takes its abandoned metal workshop history and transforms it into a space overflowing with earthy poignancy. You feel as though you've walked



(Clockwise from left) The Bosphorus; the Galata Bridge; Karabatak café; an overview of Istanbul by night.



### AT HOME IN YOUR HOUSE

Whether it's the tiniest of breaks or a longer journey, you're going to need a sexy little boutique hotel in which to crash. Something stylish, something central, and something original. Enter, The House Hotel Nişantaşı.

This imaginatively designed gem lies smack in the heart of Istanbul's most fashionable neighbourhood (above Prada, no less), and is the second address in the genre-bending House Café chain. Turkish design giant Autoban is behind the House's custom-made bookcases, handcrafted walnut furniture, glass-encased marble bathrooms, signature muted tones, and effortlessly grown-up cool. Check into a Terrace Deluxe Room on the seventh floor and be pampered by a private balcony, L'Occitane bath products, Bosphorus views that refuse to end, and even the company of your pet. The stylish lobby doubles as a sociable bar/restaurant, serving a large breakfast spread amidst Autoban's distinct flourishes.

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into an Istanbul of the past, all sepia-framed and accented with memories. Sit back on one of their old cane chairs and take in the bygone European opulence accented with shy Ottoman touches. Herr Meinl's aromatic, potent brews, savoured in the Mozart, Sherry Macchiato, and Captain Jack Sparrow concoctions, go well with the scene at hand, as does a great book, a raspberry cheesecake, and old-fashioned posters bearing 'Meinl Kaffee'.

### A DETOUR BRIMMING WITH FAITH

Istanbul is a cultural treasure-trove, but each of these treasures also comes inundated with unending crowds. In your hopes of experiencing one of the city's fabled monuments in a short span of time, why not give the (admittedly gorgeous) Aya Sofya, Topkapi Palace, Blue Mosque, and Hippodrome a miss, and set your cultural sights on the exquisite Rüstem Paşa mosque instead? Heading past the Spice Market, ducking into tiny lanes, and keeping your eyes craned for an entrance hidden above market stalls, getting to the mosque is an experience in itself. What greets you is the small but gorgeously proportioned perfection of Rüstem Paşa, designed by the Ottoman imperial architect Mimar Sinan, and crafted with turquoise, cobalt blue, emerald green, and rare red İznik faience—the famous coloured ceramic tiles. Spend some time in the mosque's large central dome, dappled with light, arched windows, and the intricate gilded beauty of the walls. Note: Though currently under renovation, the mosque isn't forecast to stay closed for long.

### UNEARTHING ISTANBUL COOL

Immerse yourself into Istanbul's rich cultural cachè with a horde of acclaimed contemporary galleries from which to choose. You won't go wrong with Galerist, a bold, beautiful space that continues to challenge convention with its aesthetic. Housed in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Misir Aparmani Block, Galerist has been both mirroring and shaping its city of birth's artistic tendencies for a decade-and-a-half. Its oeuvre is eclectic: Turkish artists pushing the boundaries of medium and space, international names dealing in that which is tactile and that which is transient, fashion designers with a penchant for experimental photography, performance exhibitionists using contour, dimension, and illusion as their palette, painters obsessed with the hyper-real and the is-it-actually-real, and anything else that catches its fancy. Galerist's greatest draw is that all the post-modernism lives contentedly within its earthy brick essence and its dust-hued wall paintings, present-day ►



(Clockwise from left) The Yeni Camii; the dome of the Rüstem Paşa; the interior of the mosque.



Istanbul kissing the past as it were. Once you're done browsing, head up to 360Istanbul on the top floor of the same building for the city at its hedonistic best.

## EXOTIC MIX OF FLAVOURS

As night descends onto Istanbul, thick with the scent of aromatic nargileh being filtered through water pipes in street cafés across the length and breadth of the city, it's time to raise a toast to taste. Tapasuma is an atmospheric gem, housed in a restored 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ottoman distillery on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. You arrive on the waves, with the property's Sumahan I vessel picking you up from the European shore and gliding you across to Tapasuma's private dock. Senses sufficiently aroused, you're duly treated to executive chef Gökay Çakıroğlu's take on Turkish and Mediterranean cuisine, with seasonal fish dishes like the seafood fettuccine alfredo and the sea bass stew served in a cast iron platter taking pride of place. The morsel-sized mezzes such as pistachio-crusting prawns are as memorable as a çentik kebab platter brimming with meatballs, chicken, beef satay, and fried julienne potatoes. Later, it's back to the European shores. Nardis Jazz Café, named after a Miles Davis classic, is an internationally-acclaimed jazz venue packing in just the right amounts of intimacy, atmosphere and spirit, not to mention a stellar line-up of celebrated foreign and Turkish stalwarts, allowing you to bid the night goodbye on a perfect note.

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## GOODBYE TO AN AFFAIR

Heart, mind, and soul truly sated by Istanbul's mystic rhythms, you awake the next morning with the thought that you're going to have to bid this great city goodbye, if only for a while. Farewell ought to be fitting, especially since breakfast is a big deal in the Turkish scheme of things. Kahvalti, the Turkish word for breakfast, literally means 'before coffee'.

Clearly the stakes are high, and Limonlu Bahçe delivers. This small oasis of greenery lies in the Galatasaray district, yet miles removed from the incessant clamour of İstiklal Caddesi. The Lemon Garden opens early in the morning and lays out a casual yet scrumptious spread of traditional breakfasts, wraps, and eggs in all its guises. The main draw to Limonlu is its unexpectedness—a garden café sanctuary a few steps away from Taksim, accessed via a narrow hole-in-the-wall staircase, is the last thing you'd expect. As you lay back in one of its quieter nooks, a chilled mocktail or cold beer accompanying your fluffy white omelettes and finely minced Turkish kebab wrap, the previous few hours' memories unspool in a rush. Beneath the canopy of foliage, a parade of sensory experiences already transformed to memories will linger, as will the thought that your flirtatious relationship with Istanbul ought to blossom into a lifelong love affair. ■