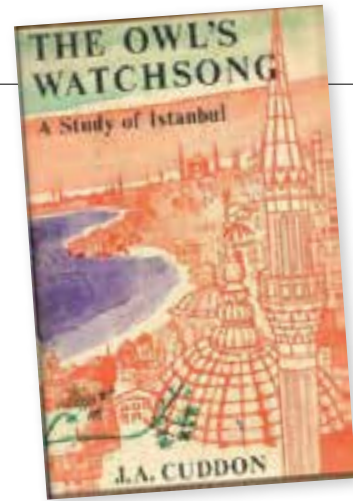


Books

A Very Vintage Summer Reading List



Books

Thought reading lists were out with school? Get to know Istanbul and Turkey better with these five vintage travelogues recommended by **Maria Eliades**.

I like Fodor's and Lonely Planet's guides for my trips as much as the next person, but to really dive into the heart of a country or a city, I've always preferred submerging myself in travelogues and fiction. No matter how old a story is, the inside perspective it gives enhances my travels in the way that guidebooks never will.

This is especially true for Turkey and Istanbul. As Freya Stark, who is one of our featured writers this month, writes, "In Turkey particularly, and in all the Levant and the Aegean, a journey without history is like the portrait of an old face without its wrinkles." In other words, you can't really travel through a place with as many civilizations and diverse peoples as Turkey without knowing a bit about its past.

These five books can be beach reads, but more likely, they'll become welcome additions to your summer travels inside and outside of Istanbul. See another side of the country as you travel this summer, or simply enjoy the trip from the comfort of your favorite armchair.

Constantinople by Edmondo De Amicis (Oneworld Classics, 277 pp.)

Take many steps back to the late 19th century with Italian novelist, journalist, and poet Edmondo De Amicis. Originally published in 1877, the 2012 translation by Stephen Parkin allows English readers to consume Istanbul as the author's contemporaries would have enjoyed it: with a heavy dollop of Orientalism. De Amicis indeed delivers a feast of the East in his account, full of eunuchs and descriptions of harem women that were in all likelihood not acquired firsthand, all of which would not pass as politically correct today, but his ability to observe sharply and to describe what he saw in such detail makes this work an all time favorite. Skip Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's infamous but floridly written *Letters from Turkey* for de Amicis's smooth prose.

The Owl's Watchsong by J.A. Cuddon (Barrie and Rockliff, 242 pp.)

J.A. Cuddon was a well-known travel writer in his time who has sadly not been reprinted, likely due to how dated his language feels. Most literature students may recognize his name if they've run into *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*, which continues to be updated, but Cuddon's real gems include his fiction and his Istanbul travelogue, which was published in 1960. His touching ode to the city perhaps owes itself in part to his own parents, who met and married here. Cuddon's narrative reveals a nuanced understanding through fine descriptions that leave a warm feeling

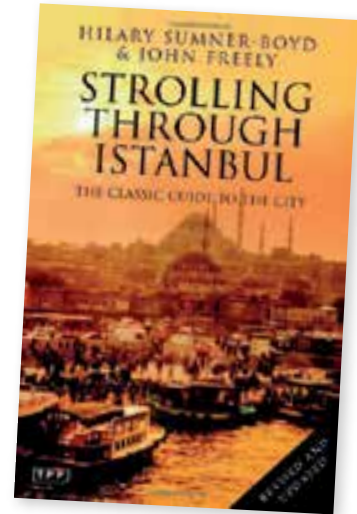
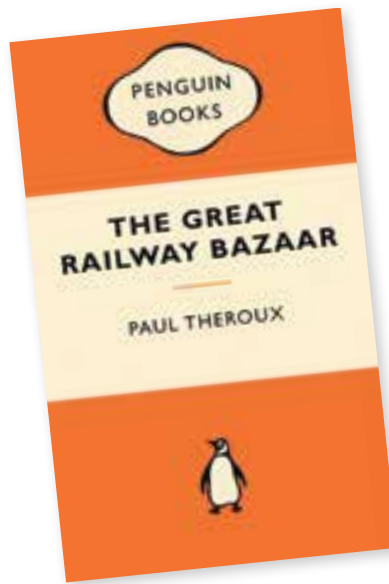
in the reader's mind after the book has ended, and perhaps a bit of sadness, too, as one exits an Istanbul that no longer exists.

The Lycian Shore by Freya Stark (John Murray, 204 pp.)

Freya Stark, who should be as well known as the Middle East expert and spy Gertrude Bell, was in her own right an expert on the Middle East, as well as a wide traveler of Turkey. She wrote a few travelogues on the country, *The Lycian Shore* (1956) being her first of three. Stark's wonderfully done ink sketches, select photographs, and a few helpful maps accompany her narrative written on what is essentially the now well-known Blue Voyage (*Mavi Yolculuk*) down the Mediterranean Coast from Izmir to Antalya, with stops at several Greek islands in between. Her focus, however, is the Ancient and Hellenistic, rather than the present, so aside from a few intriguing photographs and scenes, she does not engage with contemporary Turkey and Greece. Her narrative is beefed up by quotes and information on the area's history through sources as well known as Herodotus and Thucydides. In taking this trip with Stark, we see how she holds the past like a layered map, calling most places by their Hellenistic names, rather than their modern ones. Be forewarned, however, that she philosophizes a lot.

The Great Railway Bazaar by Paul Theroux (Penguin, 379 pp.)

Possibly Paul Theroux's best-known



work, his 1975 travelogue of his journey from London to Siberia and back mostly by rail is wonderfully written. His observations and travels are very well documented and he takes a novelistic approach in the way he set scenes and characters in the ever-changing landscape of post-colonial, but certainly not post-imperialist Asia. His sojourn through Turkey is a treat, one which has him arriving in Istanbul on the legendary but much run-down Orient Express from Paris, crossing Anatolia with the Van Lake Express to Tehran, with a spell in the Pera Palace. While the political situations he deals with

are certainly dated (see the remains of American involvement in Vietnam), the prose is so fresh and the travelers seem so unchanging that it might have been written today.

Strolling Through Istanbul by Hilary Sumner-Boyd and John Freely (Tauris Parke, 544 pp.)

This classic and still very useful guide to taking in Istanbul on foot, which is really one of the best things to do if you want to know the city, was originally published in 1987 but was updated as recently as 2010. Hilary Sumner-Boyd and John Freely, who were both professors at the

prestigious Robert College before and after it became Boğaziçi University, put together this walking guide based on walks they themselves had taken. Go step by step with the authors through various time periods of Istanbul. Their entertaining tidbits of information on bits of the city, including Topkapı, Pera and Galata, and the Bosphorus itself, make this book far livelier than your standard hiking guide. Each section even includes a sketched out map that is far better at leading you in the right direction than Google Maps, as Istanbul's streets have a way of defying being pinned down.

