The best places to eat, sleep and play in Istanbul this fall and winter

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Yes, Constantinople has been gone a long time, but Istanbul has charms that evoke both a bygone era and the seductions of the modern world. In the old city, time seems to have stopped: vendors push handcarts, shoeshine boys vie for your money and women dress in the modest Muslim tradition. Yet practically next door, you can find the ultra chic bars and dance clubs of the Beyoğlu and the trendy restaurants of Ortaköy.

Istanbul straddles Europe and Asia literally—the Bosphorus divides the city across the two continents—and figuratively, as the only city in the world that has been capital to a Christian and then an Islamic nation. Roman antiquities, Byzantine treasures and traces of the Ottoman Empire await your discovery. Most tourists find themselves on the European side, in Sultanahmet, the old city, which contains the Islamic treasures of the city: the Blue Mosque, the Topkapi Palace and the Hagia Sophia.

Istanbul’s summers are hot, humid and relatively free of precipitation, with temperatures averaging 82°C. Winters are colder; although the temperature rarely drops below freezing, snowfall is not out of the question.
ISTANBUL’S BEST VIEWS

“At the end of the day, you must find one of the hilltops (or the rooftop of your hotel) to watch this exciting and magical city as it flickers with lights, a jewel in the night.”—TripAdvisor Member

Kiz Kulesi, Istanbul’s “Maiden’s Tower, is over 2400 years old. While it can be seen from any western point along the Bosphorus, its interior begs to be seen. A sunset viewed from this location will be the cherry on top of your trip to Istanbul.”—TripAdvisor Member, Istanbul

For “killer views and a great cup of coffee, be inspired by the scenery at Pierre Loti Café and go home to write that best-selling novel. Loti is said to have conceived his literary masterpiece, Aziyadé, while gazing down at the expansive views of two continents’ shores and the estuary that separates them.”—TripAdvisor Member, Istanbul

Pierre Loti Café, Gümüşsuyu Caddesi, Balmumcu Sokak, Eyüp, 212 581 2696

Where to PLAY

TOP 10 Attractions

1. Hagia Sophia Museum / Church (Ayasofya), Sultanahmet, Eminonu District, 212 522 1750
2. Istanbul Archaeology Museum (Arkeoloji Muzesi), Osman Hamdi Bey, Sultanahmet, 212 520 7740
3. Basilica Cistern, Sultanahmet, 212 522 1259
4. Blue Mosque (Sultan Ahmet Camii), Sultanahmet, 212 518 1330
5. Kariye Museum (The Chora Church), Kariye Cami Sokak, Edirnekapi
6. Sultanahmet District
7. Istanbul Modern Museum, Meclis-i Mebusan Caddesi, Karakoy, 212 334 7300
8. Suleymaniye Mosque, near Istanbul University
9. Eyüp Sultan Mosque (Eyüp Sultan Camii), Camii Kebir Caddesi
10. Topkapi Palace, Gülhane Park, near Sultanahmet Square, 212 522 4422

FAMILIES

“A trip to Princes’ Island by ferry was the activity most enjoyed by the children. No cars on the island, so you get about by horse and buggy. Interesting old houses and excellent waterside restaurants made our day trip there a pure joy for all concerned.”—TripAdvisor Member, Istanbul

Princes’ Island, ferry leaves from Eminonu port

“For adults or kids, Rahmi M. Koç Museum is not to be missed. There is a real submarine that you can visit, old locomotives, the oldest ferry, old trams of Istanbul and antique cars from Ford-T to antique Rolls Royces, plus steam engines and more.”—TripAdvisor Member, Istanbul

Rahmi M. Koç Museum, Hasköy Cad. 27, Hasköy, 212 369 6600

ROMANCE

The Dolmabahçe Palace is “not as crowded as the Topkapı. It has a perfect guided tour and interesting Western-style furnished rooms. It’s a quiet and romantic place.”—TripAdvisor Member, Brussels, Belgium

Dolmabahçe Palace (Dolmabahçe Sarayı), Dolmabahçe Caddesi, 212 236 9000

“The most romantic place in Istanbul is the Ciragan Palace. It has a very nice jazz bar on the Bosphorus. You can see all the mosques illuminated. I would like my boyfriend to propose to me there.”—TripAdvisor Member, Athens, Greece

Ciragan Bar, Çiragan Palace, Cad. 32, Besiktas, 212 366 4646

“Take a picnic or get snacks and drinks at kiosks dotted around the Belgrad Forest. Jogging trails, hiking paths are lovely here, as are the wonderful springs, and you can hear the birds that are often drowned out by traffic in the city.”—TripAdvisor Member, Istanbul

Belgrad Forest, Bahçeköy

“…a pure joy”
**BUDGET**

“Take an old-styled tramway to Moda, or walk the shore side along the recently completed quay. This excursion is rarely covered by tour guides, but you’ll be able to glimpse the scenic enclave of Topkapi and the famed Golden Horn.”—TripAdvisor Member, Istanbul

Moda Quay

**ADVENTURE**

Want to learn how to belly-dance? “Visit Istanbul Dreams, a shop selling belly dance accessories. They will know of any classes and will be able to organize it for you. You would also be able to buy your hip belt there.”—TripAdvisor Member, Worthing, U.K.

Istanbul Dreams, Alemdar Mah, Incili Cavus Sok, No :33/5 Ates Pasaji Sultanahmet,
212 514 5894

Home to many festivals and concerts, “Parkorman is a beautiful place to spend a day with your family. It is a very big forest with a swimming pool and restaurant. You can relax, eat, enjoy nature.”—TripAdvisor Member, Athens, Greece

Parkorman, Büyükdere Caddesi, Maslak, 212 328 2000

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**EDUCATIONAL/HISTORICAL**

We were “very impressed with the Archaeology Museum. It is huge, with a lot of monuments, including the Alexander Sarcophagus.”—TripAdvisor, Bottrop, Germany

Istanbul Archaeology Museum (Arkeoloji Muzesi), Topkapi Palace, 212 520 7740

“One of the most enduring symbols of Turkey is that of the Whirling Dervishes. The Contemporary Lovers of Mevlana organize a Whirling Dervish performance every Friday and Sunday evening at the Sirkeci Train Station.”—TripAdvisor Member, Istanbul

Sirkeci Train Station (Exhibition Hall, Platform 1), 212 458 8834

“The Hippodrome was the scene of Byzantine chariot races, athletic events, victory celebrations and political activities of the old city. Today, one can also see the Obelisk from Egypt, the Serpentine Column from Delphi, the Fountain of Wilhelm II and the Colossus.”—TripAdvisor Member

Hippodrome (Atmeydani), Sultanahmet

**RELAXATION**

The Hagia Sophia Museum is “breathtaking. Its unique architecture and size, the golden, gilded geometrical and flower-motif mosaic, the wisely appointed windows that allow the light of the sun to illuminate specific places, the huge seraglio and many more features make Hagia Sophia the top sight to visit in Istanbul!”—TripAdvisor Member, Athens, Greece

Hagia Sophia Museum, Sultanahmet, 212 522 1750

“The Bosphorus Tour ferry sails north from Istanbul, up the Bosphorus, almost to the Black Sea, then back again. Along the way it stops at the small ferry ports that dot the coast. The landscape you see is wooded hills, dilapidated waterside estates of a different era, sleek modern estates very much of the present and the occasional palace and castle.”—TripAdvisor Member, Fair Lawn, N.J.

Bosphorus Tour Ferry, leaves from Eminonu’s Dock 2

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“The Blue Mosque is the most beautiful building I have ever seen. The landscaping and gardens surrounding it are gorgeous and colorful. Admission is FREE. This is an awe-inspiring place of worship.”—TripAdvisor Member, Durham, N.C.

The Blue Mosque, Sultanahmet, 212 518 1330 (for museum information only)

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“The Suleymaniye Hamam was such a relaxing experience and well worth the money. The staff were really nice and made us feel at ease. Have a tea in the ‘wise man’ area and book the free shuttle in advance to be returned to your hotel.”—TripAdvisor Member, Attyrau, Kazakhstan

Suleymaniye Hamam, Mimar Sinan Caddesi, No. 20, Suleymaniye, 212 519 5569

TripAdvisor members have posted more than 8,000,000 traveler photos on the site. The good, the bad and the very candid. It’s almost like being there!
“Taxis are the best transportation to get around Istanbul. They are inexpensive, have meters and are easy to find, most of the time.”—TripAdvisor Member, Raleigh, N.C.

Take a “bus tour of Istanbul from the Sultanahmet. (An audio guide is provided in English). We got to see a few places we would not have otherwise—and this is always a great introduction to any city.”—TripAdvisor Member, Edmonton, Alberta

For transportation from Atatürk airport, “you have three options: airport taxis, which are reliable, airport shuttle buses going to several main destinations and the Metro.”—TripAdvisor Member

“Around the newer part of Istanbul, the new subway system is very nice and safe. The subway runs from Taksim Square, through Nisantasi (where there are many elegant stores) to Etiller (where more modern shopping awaits you).”—TripAdvisor Member, Raleigh, N.C.

WHERE to eat

FAMILIES

At Rumeli Cafe, “the staff is great, and service is attentive. Our salads were excellent, and the kids loved their steak—it was lit on fire in front of them!”—TripAdvisor Member, Atlanta, Ga.

Rumeli Cafe, Ticarethane Sokak 8, Sultanahmet, 212 512 0008

“Aloran is an elegant restaurant which serves excellent food, the best place for a romantic dinner. The Testi Kebab is a spectacle for the eyes and the palate!”—TripAdvisor Member, Milan, Italy

Aloran Restaurant, Akbiyik Caddesi Adliye Sokak No. 11, Cankurtaran, 212 458 8528

ROMANCE

“Yengec Fish Restaurant are fish experts and know how to get their hands on the freshest fish and how to cook it. Their food was among the best I’ve ever had. The outdoor ambiance was authentic and romantic. Not fake and sugary but in a genuine way, where you felt you were enjoying food with family.”—TripAdvisor Member, New Jersey

Yengec Fish Restaurant, Telli Odalar Sok. No: 6, Kumkapi, 212 516 3227

BUDGET

“You’ve got to get a lick of arguably the best ice cream in Turkey at Ali Usta Dondurmaci. For $1, you get to try one of the 30-plus flavors he’s served, come rain or shine, in as many years.”—TripAdvisor Member, Istanbul

Dondurmaci Ali Usta, Moda Caddesi No: 264, 216 414 1880

“Dinner at the Imbat Restaurant is “an exquisite culinary event. While seated in the elegant and intimate dining room, sweeping views of the Bosphorus and Marmara Sea delighted us through three courses of the most delicious and beautifully prepared food I’ve ever eaten.””—TripAdvisor Member, Berlin, Germany

Imbat Restaurant, Orient Express Hotel, Sirkeci Hudavendigar, 212 520 7161

“For the “best pizza in town,” try Miss Pizza, "a small pizzeria with all kinds of unusual pizzas.”—TripAdvisor Member, Istanbul

Miss Pizza, Akarsu Cad. Havyar Sokak. No: 5 Cihangir Beyoglu, 212 251 3278 – 79

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WHERE to eat

HEALTH-CONSCIOUS

Boasting a “small and varied vegetarian menu” of soups, salads and Turkish dishes, Parsifal Vejetaryen Restoran is “ovo lacto and vegan friendly.”—TripAdvisor Member, Istanbul
Parsifal Vejetaryen Restoran, Kurabiye Sok. 23, Beyoğlu, 212 245 2588

As Istanbul’s first pure vegetarian restaurant, Saf boasts a menu full of vegan, gluten-free and dairy-free cuisine. Each dish is served “raw” to preserve the flavor and nutrition. The restaurant also has a wine bar that specializes in unique organic cocktails.
Saf, Club Sporium, Cumhuriyet Caddesi No. 4/8, Besiktas, 212 282 7946

Have dinner at “Zencefil, a vegetarian restaurant not far from Taksim Square. The food was fresh and delicious—all tasty, hot and yummy. We were way too full for dessert.”—TripAdvisor Member, Brooklyn, New York
Zencefil, Kurabiye Sok. 3, Taksim, Beyoğlu, 212 244 4082

HIDDEN GEMS

“Yes, Beyti is really worth the drive from downtown. Great service and kebabs at their best - far, far away from standard döners. Finding tastier mutton would be very difficult, if not out right impossible. There are very few celebrities, from movie stars to heads of state, who have not visited this place. In other words, you will be in a good company.”—TripAdvisor Member, Stockholm, Sweden

Beyti Restaurant, Orman Caddesi 8 Florya, 212 663 2990

“The Asitane is an Ottoman restaurant, and many of the recipes date back to the 15th and 16th centuries. For a refreshingly different approach to food, tastes and atmosphere, this is the place to go. There were so many interesting dishes. Each course was a new delight!”—TripAdvisor Member, Glasgow, Scotland

Asitane Restaurant, Kariye Camii Sokak No. 6, Edirnekapi, 212 534 8414

Located in “an unassuming setting,” Çiya Kebap is “an expert restaurant with overwhelming choice of kebaps. Tourists often miss it, but locals who are in the know swear by it. More than 70 kebaps are listed on the menu, though generally 20 – 30 are available.”—TripAdvisor Member, Bangkok, Thailand
Çiya Kebap, Çafersa Mah. Güneşbahçe Sk. No. 44 Kadıköy, 216 418 5115

SPECIAL EVENTS

Watch as the very best in women’s tennis compete for over $4 million in prize money and the title of world champion during the WTA Championships. (October 25 – 30)
WTA Championship, Sinan Erdem, http://www.wtachampionships.com

Discover the latest cutting edge works from over six thousand artists, from seasoned professionals to up-and-coming students, exhibiting their photography, painting, sculpture and more at the annual Artist fair. (November 12 – 20)
Artist, Tüyap Fair Convention and Congress Center, 212 867 1100, http://www.istanbulsanatfuari.com

Explore a world of Turkish literature at the Istanbul Book Fair, where hundreds of publishing houses present thousands of books for perusal. The theme of this year’s fair is “Hope: Dream or Reality?,” and the Writer of Honor is Ferit Edgü. (November 12 – 15)
Istanbul Book Fair, Tüyap Fair Convention and Congress Center, 212 886 6843

Take in a show at the Istanbul Film Festival, featuring hundreds of Turkish and international films, combining new films with cherished classics. The festival screens over 200 films in 20 different categories and records an attendance of almost 90,000 viewers each year. (April)
Istanbul Film Festival, Various venues, 212 334 0700, http://www.iksv.org/film

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Where to STAY

FAMILIES

“Sultanahmet Suites is situated in a residential area, yet is only a five to ten-minute walk to the tourist zone. We were greeted by the owner, who was immediately concerned that our seven-year-old have milk and juice. We immediately felt at home.”—TripAdvisor Member, Surrey, U.K.

Sultanahmet Suites, Kucuk Ayasofya Mah. Ozbekler Sok. No: 4, 1 Sultanahmet – Kadirga, 212 638 8022

“We cannot praise the Hotel Sapphire highly enough. Everything was handled in a warm and proficient manner by the friendly staff. They have free wi-fi, a subterranean pool and a buffet with enough choices to keep a teenager happy!”—TripAdvisor Member, Brisbane, Australia

Hotel Sapphire, Ibni Kemal Caddesi No.14 Sirkeci, 212 520 5686

“We stayed at Ada Istanbul with kids and found the hotel to be perfect for a family stay. Great views from the rooms and the rooftop, where a sumptuous breakfast is served.”—TripAdvisor Member, Sharjah, UAE

Ada Hotel, Binbirdirek Mahallesi Sehit Mehmetpasa, Yokusu Sokak No: 30, Sultanahmet, 212 518 8475

ROMANCE

“The high standard of the facilities and service at Hotel Seraglio is very good. We had a great experience from the moment we arrived. The rooms are spacious and comfortable, and the staff were friendly and helpful.”—TripAdvisor Member, Yue, China

Hotel Seraglio, Admiral Tafdil Sokak No. 28 Sultanahmet, 212 516 7676

“Hotel Sultania is one of the very best, a magical hotel in a magical city. The room was lovely - very atmospheric and romantic. Everyone - could not do enough to help us.”—TripAdvisor Member, Stoke-on-Trent, U.K.

Hotel Sultania, Ebusuud Caddesi, Mehmetpasa, Yokusu Sokak No: 30, Sultanahmet, 212 518 3535

BUDGET

“We spent two nights at the Hotel Seraglio, and it was fabulous. Everything about our stay was excellent. The hotel is just big enough to have privacy while still small enough to enjoy the utmost in service.”—TripAdvisor Member, California

Hotel Seraglio, Admiral Tafdil Sokak No. 28 Sultanahmet, 212 516 7676

“Orient Express Hotel is very good value for money. Very helpful staff and very well located in the heart of the historical part of the city, just walking distance from the Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace and the Hagia Sophia.”—TripAdvisor Member, Bucharest, Roumania

Orient Express Hotel, Hudavendigar Caddesi No.34, Sirkeci, 212 520 7161

You’ll receive “great value for little money at Inter Hotel. Everything was great: the location, the price, the room size, the cleanliness, the personnel. You won’t find anything better in this price category in Istanbul and hardly in a higher one.”—TripAdvisor Member, Madrid, Spain

Inter Hotel, Mithatpasa Cad. Buyuk Haydar Efendi Sok. No: 29 Beyazit, 212 518 3535

LUXURY

“The White House Hotel and its staff exceeded our expectations in every way. They arranged a pickup and dropoff to the airport. They arranged a wonderful boat trip on the Bosphorus. They did it all and always with a smile. Stay here but leave a room for us on our next visit!”—TripAdvisor Member, Kinsale, Ireland

White House Hotel Istanbul, Alemdar Mahallesi Catalcesme Sokak No.21, Sultanahmet, 212 526 0019

“This was our second time at the Four Seasons, and again, it achieved perfection. Great rooms and bathrooms, flawless service and beautiful, communal spaces. It’s pricey, but you’re paying for the superb service and the beautiful views.”—TripAdvisor Member, London, U.K.

Four Seasons Istanbul at the Bosphorus, Ciragan Caddesi No. 28, Besiktas, 212 381 4000

“Hotel Amira has everything going for it—great location, rooftop lounge, excellent breakfast and nice rooms. But, none of that makes any difference when compared to the service, which is absolutely the best. The staff are what make this hotel wonderful.”—TripAdvisor Member, Maui, Hawaii

Hotel Amira Istanbul, Kucuk Ayasofya Mah, Mustafapasa Sok. No:79, 212 516 1640

Have questions about Istanbul? Get insider advice from local experts in our forums. The majority of questions are answered within 24 hours.
HIDDEN GEMS

“The Senatus Hotel” is one of Istanbul’s best kept secrets! Very clean, modern, inexpensive, and has the quality and standards of a five star hotel. I personally enjoyed the shower with its rainforest shower head and glass enclosure.”—TripAdvisor Member, Frederick, Maryland

The Senatus Hotel, Akbiyik Caddesi No. 40, Sultanahmet, 212 458 5866

“Four of us stayed at the Witt over New Years and were spoiled rotten. The penthouses have the most stunning views of the city. The manager, Onur, is an absolute gem. If you like late night clubbing, ask about Onur’s club—very cool indeed!”—TripAdvisor Member, Qatar

Witt Istanbul Suites, Defterdar Yokusu No. 26, Cihanger, Beyoglu, 212 393 7900

Dersaadet “is a simple, tastefully decorated and highly attractive Ottoman building, ideal for travelers who appreciate local flavors and a personal touch. What a great little gem!”—TripAdvisor Member, Berlin, Germany

Dersaadet, Kucuk Ayasofya Cad. Dersaadet, Kucuk Ayasofya Cad., Kapiagasi Sokak No: 5, Sultanahmet, 212 458 0760

“...one of Istanbul’s best kept secrets!”

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