



instant escapes

Insiders' Istanbul

Second visit? Then it's time to see the real city, not the touristy one...

Roman mosaics, Byzantine churches and shopping good enough for a sultan — this cultural hotpot has enough to fill a dozen city breaks. And then there's the food scene: anything from Bosphorus-fresh fish to experimental bites. Whether you're a first-timer after the best bits, or an old hand, here's our edit of its east-west wonders. **By Tristan Rutherford**



SEE & DO

● The world's first shopping mall? That'd be the Grand Bazaar (Beyazıt Mahallesi; ① on map). Imagine 60-plus covered streets with 3,000 stores that have been catering for royalty *et al* since the 15th century. For all its touristy charm (stop by for rugs, ceramics and leather satchels), it is still the place where **Turkish gentlemen shop for their daughter's wedding jewellery** (in the Cevahir Bedesteni), and **hoteliers purchase classy bathroom linens** (try Yağlıkçılar Sokağı).

● It's an Istanbul rite of passage: a stop at the 'nostalgic photo studio'. Staff at Giyçek (Serdar-ı Ekrem Caddesi; giycek.com; from £14, including one 20cm x 30cm print; ②) dish out costumes (choose between Turkish pasha, Sultan's minstrel, harem girl...) then snap you on a divan. **Props include swords, lutes and bunches of plastic grapes**. Prints are then handed out on exit, with JPEGs for you to upload to Facebook.

● Karaköy is Istanbul's neighbourhood of the moment. This once gritty dockyard area has evolved into a chic playground for bearded Istanbul hipsters. Newly re-opened sights include the 450-year-old Kılıç Ali Paşa Hamamı steam bath (Hamam Sokak 1; kilicalipasahamami.com; steam and scrub £40; ③). Plus there's a pop-up souk (Murakıp Sokak 12; souqkarakoy.com; ④) that pops up every weekend, **selling vintage bikes, rare vinyl and vegan bites**.

I-spire: the domes and cupolas of the Hagia Sophia basilica, with the Blue Mosque in the background; below, the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara; inside the Grand Bazaar

ALCOHOL-FREE ZONE
Karaköy is trendier than thou, but many of the zone's bars are alcohol-free. Enjoy iced coffees and pomegranate crushes, or hail a taxi to boozy Beyoğlu instead

● You heard it here first. The next happening district is whispered to be the up-and-coming suburb of Balat. For now, a fabulous reason to stroll around it is the astounding, yet seldom-visited, Bulgarian St Stephen Church (Ayvansaray Caddesi; ⑤). Believe it or not, this cast-iron ecclesiastical beauty was **prefabricated in Vienna, flatpacked à la Ikea, then floated down the Danube** to its current Golden Horn locale.

● When the city crush gets too much, join Istanbul as they escape to the Princes' Islands (from Kabataş ferry dock; ido.com.tr; £2; ⑥). This car-free archipelago lies about 20km southeast of the city in the Sea of Marmara, about an hour from Downtown. Once ashore, **rent a horse-drawn carriage to one of the beach clubs that ring each island**.

● You'll be welcomed into the city's mosques with friendly smiles. Skip the touristy Blue Mosque, though, and instead take the sub-Bosphorus Metro (£1) to the Atik Valide Mosque (Çavuşdere Caddesi; ⑦) in Usküdar. You'll find there are no naff souvenir stalls here, just **Ottoman-era headstones and entrance ways adorned with Arabic script**. Inside you'll find turquoise-blue tilework, plus a cute tearoom frequented by the mosque's feral cats.

● Istanbul's standout cultural space is SALT Galata (Bankalar Caddesi 11; saltonline.org; free; ⑧). It wows visitors with its huge art library, its permanent history museum, manifold exhibition spaces and the **experimental restaurant Neolokal, housed in a glass cube on the building's roof** (see Eat overleaf). Exhibitions focus on modern Turkish history, media and contemporary art.

● Yes, it's been touted by a thousand tourist guides, but **the six-hour Bosphorus Cruise** (Boğaz Iskelesi dock; sehirhatlari.com.tr; £6; ⑨) from Eminönü quayside always **offers a fabulous city overview**. Spot millionaires in the Kempinski Cirağan Palace hotel pool ⑩; spy trends in the seaside suburb of Ortaköy ⑪; and snap Hagia Sophia ⑫ and Topkapi Palace's ⑬ iconic domes and spikes at a distance from the din. >



CUT-OUT-AND-GO GUIDE | INSIDERS' ISTANBUL

EAT

● **Seafood favourite**

SAVOY BALIK (Mains about £6)

Because: This is a once-glam, now gently retiring seafood palace, where you choose from platters of 50 *meze* (*taramasalata*, samphire salad, etc) before the main dishes. **Travel's tip:** Waiters upsell swordfish brochettes and the like to foreign first-timers — stick to *meze* and a bottle of *raki*. *Bakraç Sokak 32; 00 90 212 249 3382, savoybalik.com.tr; @*

● **Gourmet bargain**

KANTIN (Mains about £7)

Because: Many a food critic's favourite, chef Sema Denizsel wows with seasonal Aegean dishes chalked up each morning — look out for her *bonito* skewers with lemon peel. **Travel's tip:** Stroll out of Kantin straight into Nişantaşı's swish (if poncey) shopping streets. *Akkavak Sokak 30; 00 90 212 219 3114, kantin.biz; @*

● **Rooftop secret**

FERAHFEZA (Mains about £9)

Because: This seaview rooftop is the ultimate impress-your-mates cocktail and seafood hotspot. **Travel's tip:** To gain access, saunter into the Istanbul Architectural Institute, then ride the elevator up to the fifth floor. A secret rooftop party awaits. *Kemankeş Caddesi 31; 00 90 212 243 5154; @*

● **Contemporary treats**

GUMRUK (Mains about £10)

Because: This new Greco-Anatolian eatery dishes up daily treats such as *tabbouleh* with beetroots and sea bream. **Travel's tip:** Gümrük's black-and-white photos were shot by famous city snapper Ara Güler, whose books you can buy in the shop at SALT Galata nearby. *Gümrük Sokak 4; 00 90 212 244 2252, karakoygumruk.com.tr; @*

● **Experimental blow-out**

NEOLOKAL (Mains about £13)

Because: Heston-style head chef Maksut Aşkar busts out obscure dishes (such as haddock and tamara biscuits with bottarga powder) in the rooftop cube above the SALT gallery. **Travel's tip:** The £28pp five-glass Anatolian wine-pairing that accompanies the six-course menu (£40pp) is well worth it. *Bankalar Caddesi 11; 00 90 212 244 0016, neolokal.com; @*

HOOKAH PIPE PRO

Nothing conjures up local Istanbul like smoking a sheesha, known as a *nargile*. It's considered an old man's pastime, which renders the city's tea gardens tranquil retreats

SEAFOOD ON THE SIDE

Istanbul's sip anise-scented *raki* alongside a seafood feast. Ask for a bottle of *Beylerbeyi*, the Laphroaig of its kind

LOCAL'S TOP TIP

'Our IKSIV offices are in Galata, where tourists queue for an hour to climb the Galata Tower. Get the same view from the rooftop bar of Anemon Hotel on the same square'

SHEESHA CAFES

● **Oasis of calm**

ERENLER ÇAY BAHÇESİ

Because: This teashop is a respite from the Grand Bazaar and is friendly to first- and old-timers. It's the place to order an apple-flavoured pipe. **Travel's tip:** Erenler is Istanbul's Instagram moment. Post yourself mid-puff with the atmospheric Ottoman decor in the background. *Yeniçeriler Caddesi 36; @*

● **Garden of pleasure**

LALE ÇAY BAHÇESİ

Because: In a magnificent sunken orchard near the Süleymaniye Mosque, this walled garden seats 100. About 20 tobacco flavours are available. **Travel's tip:** Go local with a glass of *ayran*, a throat-soothing yoghurt drink. *Sifhane Sokak 2; @*

● **Fun & games**

TAYFUN KAHVE VE NARGİLE

Because: Shoot backgammon and sip Turkish coffee after a trip to the nearby Istanbul Modern Art Museum. Sheeshas cost about £4. **Travel's tip:** Challenge Tayfun's friendly *habitués* to a match — they are backgammon hot stuff. *Boğazkesen Caddesi 21; @*



ASK THE LOCAL

Elif Obdan works for IKSIV, which organises Istanbul's Design Biennial and Music, Film, Theatre and Jazz Festivals (iksiv.org)

Forget the fancy shopping in Nişantaşı; instead try the young fashion designer Yasemin Ozeri's place (Galip Dede Caddesi 93; yaseminozeri.com; @) in the less expensive Galata area a few Metro stops away. Her elegant frocks, sandals and bags start at £20. For lunch nearby, hit Galata Kitchen (Tatar Beyi Sokak 9; @), where two Istanbul mammas prepare classic Anatolian dishes. If Sultanahmet sounds too obvious for historical sights, visit the Chora Church Museum (Kariye Camii Sokak; chora museum.com; £3.50; @) for beautiful mosaics and frescoes from the Eastern Roman period. From there you can walk all the way to the Golden Horn.



STAY

● **Your slice of Istanbul**

ISTANBUL SWEET HOME

(Apartments from £350pw — ie, £50 a night, self-catering)

Because: This collection of nine apartments, all managed by bohemian host Metehan Bey, works out cheaper than a hotel when booked by the week. **Travel's tip:** Some stunning seascape apartments sport typically Turkish decor, but they're in old buildings — which can mean a three-floor walk up. Various locations; 00 90 212 230 8921, istanbulsweethome.com.

● **The trendy bargain**

SUBKARAKOY (Doubles from £51, B&B)

Because: It's a hip hotel with a spellbinding roof terrace in the once tawdry, now trendy, dockyards area of Karaköy. **Travel's tip:** Explore the city on its Vespa scooters for £21 per day. Hotel owner Cigdem Sungur offers guests a map annotated with every insider sight you could possibly want. *Necatibey Caddesi 91; 00 90 212 243 0005, subkarakoy.com; @*

● **Architectural brilliance**

HAMAMHANE (Doubles from £64, B&B)

Because: It's part Ottoman palazzo, part warehouse, with exposed ironwork and bare brick walls. **Travel's tip:** Ask hotel boss Bulent Bey for a sneaky tour of the abandoned 19th-century steam baths he's renovating next door — it's eerily atmospheric. *Cukurcuma Caddesi 45, Beyoğlu; 00 90 212 293 4963, hammamhane.com; @*

● **Sexy in the city**

KARAKOY ROOMS (Doubles from £70, B&B)

Because: This is a set of classy apartments that mix herringbone parquet, lashings of marble and fine linens, with the occasional sea view thrown in. **Travel's tip:** Residents get a blow-out breakfast in Karaköy Lokantasi, the establishment's gourmet seafood restaurant. Its reputation is so good it's a devil to get a reservation for dinner. *Kemankeş Caddesi 10; 00 90 212 252 5422, karakoyrooms.com; @*

First class: clockwise from top left, the bar at Raffles; experimental food at SALT gallery's Neolokal; interior of Karaköy Rooms; rooftop terrace at Hotel Ibrahim Pasha; view from Gümrük

FREEBIE TIP-OFF

Many Istanbul hotels, Karaköy Rooms included, offer free airport pick-up if you stay three nights or more

● **Hot roof terrace**

HOTEL İBRAHİM PAŞA (Doubles from £85, B&B)

Because: A perfect *mélange* of trad and trendy means you can shower atop Turkish marble, and knock back Turkish Sauvignon Blanc on the cool roof terrace, while gazing over to the Blue Mosque. **Travel's tip:** If morning prayers from the mosque wake you, then make the most of your time — plan your day using Ibrahim Pasha's Old City walking app. *Terzihane Sokak 7; 00 90 212 518 0394, ibrahimpasha.com; @*

● **No-limits decadence**

RAFFLES (Doubles from £275, B&B)

Because: This is an uproariously Rococo five-star, with butlers à go-go, staff who seem to know your name, and a spa you can get lost in. **Travel's tip:** Raffles has a deal with Atatürk airport: guests are whisked through VIP security then transferred to the hotel's rooftop by chopper. That's luggage carousel to hotel suite in 15 minutes flat. *Zorlu Center, Zincirlikuyu; 00 90 212 924 0200, raffles.com/istanbul; @*

GET ME THERE GO INDEPENDENT

Pegasus (flypgs.com) flies to Istanbul from Gatwick and Stansted, from £83 return. **Turkish Airlines** (thy.com) flies from Heathrow, Gatwick, Birmingham, Manchester and Edinburgh, from £82 return. **BA** (ba.com) flies from Heathrow from £109 return.

GO PACKAGED

BA Holidays (0844 493 0787, ba.com) has three nights in five-star accommodation from £319pp, room only, with flights from Heathrow. **Kirker** (020 7593 2283, kirkerholidays.com) has three nights in four-star accommodation from £729pp, B&B, with flights from Heathrow.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Turkish e-Visas (www.evisa.gov.tr; £14) can be purchased easily in minutes online and you can go straight through customs with the printout. See also gototurkey.co.uk for more details on Istanbul. ■