

Sultanahmet & Around

SULTANAHMET | KÜÇÜK AYASOFYA | GÜLHANE | SIRKECI | EMINÖNÜ



Neighbourhood Top Five

- ❶ Standing beneath the magnificent dome of **Aya Sofya** (p50) and imagining what it would have been like to attend a candlelit service in this, the greatest of all Byzantine churches.
- ❷ Uncovering the secrets of the seraglio in opulent **Topkapı Palace** (p57).
- ❸ Learning about the fascinating history of the city in the **Istanbul Archaeology Museums** (p69).
- ❹ Exploring the watery depths of the atmospheric **Basilica Cistern** (p71).
- ❺ Surrendering to the steam and admiring the historic surrounds in an Ottoman-era **hamam** (p85).

For more detail of this area see Maps p238 and p240 ➔

Explore: Sultanahmet

The fact that there are so many significant monuments and museums in this area means that devising an itinerary is important. To do the neighbourhood justice, you'll need at least three days (four or five would be better).

Plan to visit one of the major museums (Aya Sofya, Topkapı Palace, the Istanbul Archaeology Museums, the Museum of Turkish & Islamic Arts) each day and then add the less time-intensive sights into your daily itineraries. For instance, it makes sense to visit the Archaeology Museums and Gülhane Park together on one day and Aya Sofya, the Blue Mosque and the Basilica Cistern on another.

The ever-present battalions of tour groups tend to visit the museums first thing in the morning or after lunch – you will find that queues are shorter and exhibits less crowded if you visit during lunchtime or later in the afternoon.

This isn't a part of town where many locals live. Restaurants, cafes and shops are geared towards tourists and prices reflect this fact.

Local Life

➔ **Produce markets** There are weekly street markets in Cankurtaran on Wednesday and in nearby Kadırga on Thursday.

➔ **Backgammon** Head to Derviş Aile Çay Bahçesi (p82) or Cafe Meşale (p82) to join locals in smoking nargiles (water pipes), drinking tea and playing backgammon.

➔ **Promenade** On weekends, follow the families who promenade through the Hippodrome (p72) and picnic in Gülhane Park (p79).

Getting There & Away

➔ **Tram** Efficient tram services link Cevizlibağ and Bağcılar in the city's west with Kabataş in Beyoğlu. From here, a funicular runs up to Taksim Meydanı (Taksim Sq). Trams stop at the Grand Bazaar, Sultanahmet, Gülhane Park and Eminönü en route. Get off the tram at the Sultanahmet stop to visit most of the sights in this chapter.

Lonely Planet's Top Tip

If you are spending a full three days in the city and plan to visit the major museums in Sultanahmet, the Museum Pass İstanbul (p73) will save you money and enable you to jump ticket queues.

Best Places to Eat & Drink

- ➔ Balıkcı Sabahattin (p81)
- ➔ Matbah (p82)
- ➔ Hocaşa Sokak (p80)
- ➔ Güvenç Konyalı (p82)
- ➔ Set Üstü Çay Bahçesi (p83)

For reviews, see p80. ➔

Best Places to Shop

- ➔ Cocoon (p83)
- ➔ Özlem Tuna (p84)
- ➔ Jennifer's Hamam (p84)
- ➔ Mehmet Çetinkaya Gallery (p84)

For reviews, see p83. ➔

Best Museums

- ➔ Aya Sofya (p50)
- ➔ Topkapı Palace (p57)
- ➔ İstanbul Archaeology Museums (p69)
- ➔ Museum of Turkish & Islamic Arts (p74)

For reviews, see p50. ➔