

Sultanahmet & Around



Neighbourhood Top Five

1 Aya Sofya (p54) Standing beneath the magnificent dome, imagining what it would have been like to attend a candlelit service in the greatest of all Byzantine churches.

2 Topkapı Palace (p109) Uncovering the secrets of the Harem in this opulent complex, which evokes the exotic, savage, *Game of Thrones*-like customs of the Ottoman court.

3 Blue Mosque (p118) Gazing up at the six minarets and many domes of the Ottoman masterpiece.

4 Basilica Cistern (p76) Exploring the atmospheric Byzantine cistern's watery depths.

5 Ayasofya Hürrem Sultan Hamamı (p90) Surrendering to the steam and admiring the historic surrounds in a restored Ottoman hamam such as this 16th-century beauty, commissioned by Süleyman the Magnificent and designed by the great Mimar Sinan.

Explore Sultanahmet & Around

With so many significant monuments and museums in close proximity, devising an itinerary helps to make the most of your time. You'll need at least three days (four or five would be better) to do the neighbourhood justice.

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

Don't worry if your plan of attack doesn't recall the military precision of the Ottomans' capture of Constantinople in 1453: retracing your steps is a pleasure when you pass the likes of Aya Sofya.

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.

Local Life

➔ **Produce markets** There are weekly street markets in Cankurtaran on Wednesdays and in nearby Kadırga on Thursdays.

➔ **Backgammon** Head to Derviş Aile Çay Bahçesi (p85) or Cafe Meşale (p85) to join locals in smoking nargiles (water pipes), drinking tea and playing backgammon.

➔ **Promenade** On weekends, make like the local families who promenade through the Hippodrome (p77) and picnic in Gülhane Park (p81).

➔ **Küçük Ayasofya** Walking the quiet back streets of this residential neighbourhood gives a glimpse of everyday life beyond the tourist haunts.

Getting There & Away

➔ **Tram** The easiest way to reach Sultanahmet from Beyoğlu. The route crosses the Galata Bridge from Kabataş (where a funicular climbs to Taksim) and Karaköy (where a funicular climbs to Tünel) to the stops at Eminönü (terminal for ferries over the Bosphorus and up the Golden Horn), Sirkeci, Gülhane, Sultanahmet, Çemberlitaş and Beyazıt-Kapalı Çarşı (Grand Bazaar). Sultanahmet is the best stop for most of the sights in this area.

Lonely Planet's Top Tip

If you are spending a few days in the city and plan to visit the major museums in Sultanahmet, the **Museum Pass İstanbul** (www.muze.gov.tr/en/museum-card) will save you money and enable you to jump ticket queues.

Best Museums

- ➔ Aya Sofya (p54)
- ➔ Topkapı Palace (p61)
- ➔ Museum of Turkish & Islamic Arts (p77)
- ➔ İstanbul Archaeology Museums (p74)
- ➔ Carpet Museum (p79)

For reviews, see p77. ➔

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Deraliye (p84)
- ➔ Balıkçı Sabahattin (p84)
- ➔ Hocapaşa Sokak (p82)
- ➔ Cooking Alaturka (p84)
- ➔ Sefa Restaurant (p82)

For reviews, see p82. ➔

Best Places to Shop

- ➔ Galeri Kayseri (p89)
- ➔ Özlem Tuna (p88)
- ➔ Jennifer's Hamam (p88)
- ➔ İznik Classics (p89)
- ➔ Mehmet Çetinkaya Gallery (p89)
- ➔ Khaftan (p89)

For reviews, see p88. ➔