

## Ottoman Empire and Byzantine Legacy tour

**Access to Locations:** Easy to medium

You will need a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen and sensible shoes (no flip flops, please)

**Approximate Duration:** 9 hours

- Old Hippodrome of Istanbul
- The Blue Mosque
- Hagia Sofia
- Topkapi Palace
- The Grand Bazaar

**This Istanbul tour is drenched in atmosphere. We take you through the commercial center of modern Istanbul, across the Galata Bridge, deep into the Byzantine and Ottoman history of this incredible city.** Our coach will take you **along the coastline of Istanbul's Golden Horn past the Sulemaniye Mosque, a landmark of 16th century Ottoman architecture and a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#).** Our destination is **beautiful Sultanahmet Square, home to the Blue Mosque, the former basilica of Hagia Sophia, the Basilica Cistern, Topkapi Palace and the Old Hippodrome of Istanbul, our first stop.**

**The Old Hippodrome of Istanbul is an ancient circus built before the founding of Constantinople.** A public recreation space designed to resemble the Roman Circus Maximus and its characteristic "U" shape, which participants had to circle seven times, the Hippodrome was a public recreation space for opulent horse and chariot racing spectacles. **Some of its more significant structures include Kaiser Wilhelm's Fountain, the Serpent Column of Delphi (bronze), the Egyptian Obelisk and the Walled Obelisk of Constantine VII,** but the four bronze horses which decorated the Hippodrome's gates and the statues of celebrated charioteers which stood proudly on its grounds are no longer here.

We walk from the Hippodrome to **the Blue Mosque, Istanbul's largest and most beautiful. It's also called the Sultan's Mosque, since it was built, between 1609 and 1616, by order of Sultan Ahmed I, who was 20 years-old at the time and is now buried within its walls.** An exceptional example of Islamic architecture, many of the pious begin their journey to Mecca from the Blue Mosque. **The sultan wanted to build the most magnificent mosque in all of Islam, and he wanted no expense spared** – he even demanded a dome of pure gold, which was impossible because of the weight of gold. His architect built the dome from simple materials and surrounded it with six exquisite minarets and, when confronted by the sultan, pretended he

had misunderstood, that he had heard “alti” (six), not “altin,” (gold). **It is called the blue mosque because of the blue tiles upon its interior walls.**

We leave the Blue Mosque for **Hagia Sophia, also known as the “Church of the Wisdom of God” and “the Great Church.”** The Church has long been a symbol of Constantinople and Istanbul. **From the date construction began, in 537, during the reign of Justinian, until 1453, Hagia Sophia served as an Eastern Orthodox cathedral and the seat of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, except for the period between 1204 and 1261, when it was converted to a Roman Catholic cathedral under the Latin Empire. The building was used as a mosque from the fall of Constantinople, on 29 May 1453, until 1931. It is now a museum, where beautiful mosaics completed over the course of more than 12 centuries are on display. It is considered one of the preeminent extant examples of Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture.**

After a delicious lunch at a local restaurant, we visit **the Topkapi Palace Museum, the site of the acropolis of ancient Byzantium. Initially constructed between 1460 and 1478 by Sultan Mehmed II, the palace, initially called the “New Palace,” served as the home of the Ottoman sultans and their courts until the middle of the 19th century.** The basic design of the palace, which was designated a museum by Ataturk in 1924, encompasses a number of exquisite courtyards and gardens. **Its collection includes Ottoman and European silverware, European porcelains and glassware, weapons, manuscripts, Islamic relics, portraits of the Sultans and even some of their robes and other clothing.** Topkapi is one of the locations in the Oscar-winning 1964 caper, *Topkapi*, which starred the legendary Greek actress, singer, author and Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri.

Our excursion concludes with plenty of time for shopping! **The awesome Grand Bazaar, which is also called Kapali Carci (“Covered Bazaar”), is one of the oldest and largest covered markets on earth. The bazaar, which first opened in 1461, comprises about 60 streets and welcomes up to 400,000 visitors per day to its maze of banks, cafes, fountains, shops, shrines and workshops.** It will make the mall back home seem like a dollhouse. We only hope you can carry all your purchases back to the ship!

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Adult Price € 109,00  
Child price only € 67,00  
City Tour

**Bosphorus Cruise from Europe to Asia**

**Access to Locations:** Easy to medium

You will need a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen and sensible shoes (no flip flops, please)

**Approximate Duration:** 3 hours

- First Bridge
- Beylerbeyi Palace
- Dolmabahce
- Ciragan Palace
- The Castle of Anatolia
- Kanlica
- Zindan Han

**Our Bosphorus cruise, in a private tender boat, is an excursion unlike anything you've ever experienced, the Occident to one side, the Orient to the other!** It's a waterborne Istanbul tour that's sure to delight.

**Board your coach and start your Istanbul cruise with a drive to Asia!** You'll enjoy a magnificent view from the Bosphorus Bridge, or "First Bridge," a suspension bridge completed in 1973 and the first to link the European and Anatolian (Asian) sections of the city. **We cross the bridge and drive to exquisite Beylerbeyi Palace, a 19th century gem on the eastern shore of the Bosphorus. This neo-baroque summer palace was built between 1861 and 1865 by Sultan Abdulaziz and welcomed important foreign guests of the Ottoman Empire,** including the Prince of Serbia, King Nicholas of Montenegro, Emperor Joseph of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Shah Nasireddin of Iran, Prince Oscar of Sweden and Empress Eugenie of France. In 1918 Sultan Abdulhamid II died in the palace after spending the last six years of his life here. Beylerbeyi Palace is divided into a men's section, the Selamlık, and a women's section, the Harem, each with its own entrance. The Selamlık, which was very ornate, was used for state functions.

**We sail past the incredibly luxurious palaces of Dolmabahce, the largest in Turkey and Ciragan, on the European side of the Strait.** Completed in 1856, Dolmabahce Palace was an Ottoman residence and administrative center for six sultans and the summer residence of Ataturk, who died in his bedroom here in 1938. **Dolmabahce Palace has been a museum since 1960, while nearby Ciragan Palace, also built in the 19th century, is a five-star hotel, one of the most expensive in the world.**

**We glide beneath the Bosphorus Bridge and the second bridge across the strait, Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridges, passing the Castle of Anatolia,** which was completed in 1394 by Sultan

Bayezid I, "The Thunderbolt," as he prepared for the Second Ottoman Siege of Constantinople, which commenced in 1395. From here we sail past **the enchanting village of Kanlica**, on the shores of the Bosphorus at its narrowest point and **home to some of Istanbul's magnificent wooden "yalis," houses and mansions that seem to lean into the Strait.**

We disembark from our tender boat to visit the [Zindan Han \(Dungeon Inn\) Jewelry Store](#). **Part of the han was built during the 9th century and used as a dungeon for women prisoners, one of the world's first.** A three-storey trading house was built atop the dungeon in the 19th century and today houses this **world famous jewelry store, where you'll have a chance to shop and enjoy some local coffees and teas before returning to your ship.**

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Adult Price € 35,00

Child price only € 22,00

City Tour

### **Discover the hidden secrets of Sultanahmet Square**

**Access to Locations:** Easy to medium

You will need a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen and sensible shoes (no flip flops, please)

**Approximate Duration:** 4 hours

- The Blue Mosque
- Hagia Sofia
- Basilica Cistern
- Nakkas

We begin this tour of [miraculous Istanbul](#) at the Mosque of Sultan Ahmed, "The Blue Mosque" or "Sultan's Mosque," one of the city's most important monuments. It was built between 1609 and 1616, by order of Sultan Ahmed I, who was 20 years-old at the time and is now buried within its walls. An exceptional example of Islamic architecture, many of the pious begin their journey to Mecca from the Blue Mosque. The sultan wanted to build the most magnificent mosque in all of Islam, and he wanted no expense spared – he even demanded a dome of pure gold, which was impossible because of the weight of gold. His architect built the dome from simple materials and surrounded it with six exquisite minarets and, when confronted by the

sultan, pretended he had misunderstood, that he had heard “alti” (six), not “altin,” (gold). It is called the blue mosque because of the blue tiles upon its interior walls.

We depart from the Blue Mosque for a short walk to **Hagia Sophia, also known as the “Church of the Wisdom of God” and “the Great Church.” The Church has long been a symbol of Constantinople and Istanbul. From the date construction began, in 537, during the reign of Justinian, until 1453, Hagia Sophia served as an Eastern Orthodox cathedral and the seat of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, except for the period between 1204 and 1261, when it was converted to a Roman Catholic cathedral under the Latin Empire. The building was used as a mosque from the fall of Constantinople, on 29 May 1453, until 1931. A museum since 1934, it is now home to beautiful mosaics completed over the course of more than 12 centuries. It is one of the preeminent examples of extant Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture.**

We next visit the Basilica Cistern, also known as the “Cistern of Philoxenos” or the “Sunken Palace.” **The Cistern is like an entire world beneath Hagia Sophia. Constructed by Emperor Justinian in 535, it supplied water to the first of the seven hills of Constantinople.** A marvel of Byzantine architecture, it comprises **336 marble columns, Corinthian, Doric and Ionian, each towering to approximately nine meters (30 feet).** At the end of the chamber await two spectacular columns, each standing upon a base carved in the shape of the head of Medusa.

Our final destination is [Nakkas](#), where **traditional Turkish carpets** are woven and displayed. Housed in a four-storey building **alongside the Hippodrome in Sultanahmet Square**, Nakkas sells carpets, kilim rugs and antique pieces woven in various locations throughout Anatolia. The gallery, on the ground floor, is **a restored 6<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine cistern** – exhibitions of work by local and international artists are held here, and the space is also used for music performances. We’ll enjoy a demonstration of rug weaving, followed by **a visit to the top floor of the building for local drinks and snacks with an awesome view of Istanbul and the Sea of Marmara.**

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Adult Price € 54,00

Child price only € 33,00

City Tour