Istanbul
the queen of megapolises
Istanbul is one of the world’s most magical and enchanting cities. The two continents of Europe and Asia meet and embrace here across the Bosphorus Straits, carrying with them unique flavours of the Orient and the Occident. Since the dawn of time, Istanbul has been a meeting place of people from different religious and cultures, people who came together and learned to live in peace and harmony.

Three major empires ruled the world from this city, the Romans, the Byzantines and the Ottomans, and each of these left their mark on the city, whether it was cultural or architectural.

Modern Istanbul resembles an open-air museum, as the pages from your history books come alive before your eyes, wherever you turn you are faced with ancient monuments, mosques, churches, synagogues and palaces.

And surrounding the whole city is one of the world’s most coveted and most beautiful waterways - the Bosphorus - which flows 32 km.s between Europe and Asia. Along the shores of the Bosphorus is a garland of charming small villages that have existed since time immemorial, once home to Istanbul’s Christian and Jewish minorities. Here one can see imperial palaces, gardens, fortresses and the traditional old wooden houses known as yalis, that grace the shorelines of the breathtaking Bosphorus.

A lot of people visit Istanbul, to enjoy the Turkish Cuisine, which is said to be one of the finest in the world because of its use of fresh ingredients and suthiety of flavours.

Although Istanbul is a large metropolis with over fifteen millions inhabitants, its exoticims, its sights, sounds and smells will remind you that you are definitely in a foreign land, but at the same time the facilities and services you will find here create a home from home comfort.

In many ways, as in the past, Istanbul is the capital of future - marriage of East and West or the benefit of both.
Compelling reasons why Istanbul is an ideal destination for Congresses, Meetings & International Events

UNIQUE LOCATIONS - Meeting of Continents

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CENTRAL LOCATION FOR EASY TRAVEL

In today’s world of instant communications, Istanbul enjoys of being in the same central location as it did in the ancient world.

The average flying time to reach Istanbul is only between 2.5-3 hours from all major cities of Euroe, Middle East, North Africa, CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) member countries. The flying time from New York to Istanbul is 9 hours and from Tokyo is 11 hours.

Istanbul’s new and modern international airport receives two daily direct flights from all major European Cities, Continent of America, Middle and Far East.

A CITY OF HARMONY IN COUNTRY OF TRUST

The cultural diversity of Istanbul defines exaggeration.

A Roman city turned Christian, it was also the seat of the Islamic Caliphate that preserved the Patriarchate of Christian Orthodoxy. It has been a refuge for Jews fleeing from Spain. Belonging to 3 different world religions and speaking 10 different languages the 26 ethnic groups living in Istanbul share a common goal; Istanbul is our home and we live in a peace. Today Istanbul is proud to be the most important city of secular and democratic republic. The cultural life of Istanbul has always been based on its ability to attract people from different parts of the globe to absorb ideas and merge the contribution of different civilizations.

HISTORICAL TREASURES

Being the capital city of three important empires, East Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman and also hosting different races and civilizations, the city became like an open air museum.

The historical treasures remaining from 3 great civilizations lend the City a very special atmosphere... St. Sophia Cathedral, Topkapı Palace, Blue Mosque, Valens Aqueduct, St. Savior in Chora, Hypodrome and many more...

ORIENTAL TOUCH WITH INTERNATIONAL SOPHISTICATION

Istanbul with its super and infra structure, has a very modern world city atmosphere but spiced with exoticism and sophistication.
HAGIA SOPHIA

Hagia Sophia is one of the world’s most important buildings in respect of its architecture. This ancient basilica was built by Constantine the Great but was destroyed by fire. A new church was built at the same place by Theodosius II, but also burnt down. It was reconstructed by Justinian in the 6th Century. To stand in Saint Sophia is like to witness sixteen hundred years of history. The Hagia Sophia is now been a nominee for the new 7 wonders of the world.

ST. SAVIOUR IN CHORA MUSEUM

A legendary Byzantine church decorated with extraordinary late 14th century frescoes and mosaics portraying the life and miracles of Christ. The most important and extensive series of Byzantine paintings in the city and among the most significant in the world.

HIPPODROME

The vast area that lies between Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque, was the Hippodrome of Constantinople. During the Byzantine era the Hippodrome was the centre of civil activities. Not only chariot races, but also celebrations in honour of the emperor took place here. Today one can see the Obelisk of Theodosius, the Plated Column and the Serpentine Column here.

UNDERGROUND CISTERN

Yerebatan Sarayı (Underground Seraglio), is the Turkish name for the Byzantine Period Underground Cistern which is the grandest and most impressive one of its kind in Istanbul. The giant reservoir was built in the 6th Century. The water that came from the Belgrade forest 19km away was used for the palaces. It is 140m long 70m wide. It has 336 columns, which support the brick dome and arrange 12 rows of 28 each and are topped by Byzantine Corinthian Capitals. The Cistern was renovated in 1987. (See James Bond movie “With Love from Russia”!) Apart visiting as an historical place, special organisations, cocktails and art & cultural shows are performed upon request.
SULTANAHMET MOSQUE - THE BLUE MOSQUE

It is known as the Blue Mosque because of its magnificent interior decoration of blue “Iznik” tiles. Blue Mosque stands firmly opposite of Hagia Sophia with its supremely elegant imperial 6 minarets as the mosque of Sultan Ahmet I. Inside one cannot fail to be affected by the cool, mystical light reflected from every angle, and the blue tiles striking both for their colour and the immense area over which they are displayed.

TOPKAPI PALACE

Overlooking the Golden Horn stands the mare of buildings that was the great palace of the Ottoman Sultans - Topkapi Palace - from the 15th to the 19th Century. Today it is one of the richest museums of the world. Topkapi was not just the private residence of the Sultan and his court but as the home of the Divan (the Cabinet) was the seat of the Supreme executive and of judicial control of a great empire. It houses the best astonishing collections of rare objects which once belonged to the Sultans.

DOLMABAHÇE PALACE

Sultan Abdülmecid I, who founded Topkapi Palace old fashioned, erected the present Dolmabahçe Palace in Turkish Renaissance Style in 1843 - 1856. Among other celebrities the French empress Eugenia, wife of Napolean III, the Austrian emperor Franz Josef, the German emperor Wilhelm II, the English prince Edward VII, the Persian Shah Reza Pahlevi, King Faisal, King Emanullah were guests here. After the Empire was terminated in 1923, Atatürk stayed at the palace on his trips to Istanbul. He died here in November 1938.
HiGHLiGHTs of istanbul

GRAND COVERED BAZAAR

In 1461 the first bazaar was built of wood, on the order of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, which is now called as “Eski Bedesten” the primitive of all. After several fires the bazaar was reconstructed in 1894. Today the domed buildings surrounded by a wall, occupies an area of 200,000 sqm. Approximately 4,000 shops are spread out in a giant labyrinth of small streets and passages, which are mostly arranged according to their trades: rugs, antiques, gold, silver, leather etc.

BEYLERBEYİ PALACE

This palace was constructed in the same style as Dolmabahce Palace. It is situated on the Asiatic Shore of the Bosphorus and was built during the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz in the year 1865. The Palace consists of 24 rooms and 6 walls. Italian, French and Turkish artists created the ceiling decorations. The palace was the Summer Palace of the Sultan.
The straits separating Europe and Asia, joining the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara. It is 31.7 km long with a width of 3.2 km at the maximum and 0.118 km at the minimum.

For much of their length the shores are lined with handsome buildings; wooden waterside villas known as yalis, graceful mosques and opulent 19th century marble palaces. The grander residences along the Bosphorus have waterfront entrances. These date from the days when wooden caiques (boats powered by a strong team of oarsmen) were a popular form of transportation along the straits among the city’s wealthier inhabitants. The coastline also provides different opportunities to visitors with several groves, tea gardens, cafes, bars, restaurants and private clubs.

The two sides of Istanbul is now linked to each other by 2 suspension bridges namely; Intercontinental Bosphorus Bridge (opened in 1974) and Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge (opened in 1988). At night, with the lights they look like the bracelets of the Bosphorus.

One of the great pleasure of a visit to Istanbul is a cruise up the Bosphorus. This cruise can either be day cruise (with or without lunch) or a dinner cruise.
The district which is on a steep hill north of Golden Horn called Beyoğlu, the hearth of the modern part, for centuries was home to the city’s foreign residents. First to arrive here were the Genovese. As a reward for their help in the re-conquest of the city from the Latin’s in 1261 (Byzantine Period) they were given the Galata area. Which is now dominated by the Galata Tower. During the Ottoman period Jews from Spain, Arabs, Greeks and Armenians settled in communities here. From 16th century on European countries have established their embassies here. After Ankara became the capital, these embassies became consulates. The district has not changed much in character over centuries and is still a thriving commercial quarter today.

The pedestrianized Istiklal Caddesi is Beyoğlu’s main street. Cadde means street in Turkish. The street once known as Grand Rue de Pera or Cadde-i Kebir (kebir means grand), is lined by late 9th century apartment blocks and European consulate buildings and churches. With hundreds of shops and a lot of cinemas, the street is still one of the most attractive shopping and entertainment areas of Istanbul. Today, the once seedy backstreets of Beyoğlu, off Istiklal Caddesi, are taking on a new lease of life, with trendy jazz bars, cafes, antique shops and stylish restaurants.

Places of Interest are; Flower Arcade, Fish Market, Mewlevi Monastery, Pera Palas Hotel, Galata Tower, Church of St Anthony of Padua, Church of St Peter and St Paul, Arab Mosque.

Nişantaşı & Teşvikiye; Istanbul’s most popular shopping districts offer you world-wide renown boutiques such as Armani, DKNY, Gucci, Louis Vutton, Swarovski and variety of brands. These districts are also Istanbul’s gourmet districts where you have international label’s and the city’s best restaurants, bars and cafés.

The neighbourhood boasts about its buildings with beautiful architecture, home to the “elite” Istanbul families and major company head offices, a combination which contributes to the liveliness of Tesvikiye both day and night.
The Pine Forested Princess Islands provide a welcome break from the bustle of the city and are just a short ferry ride southeast from the city. The islands take their name from a royal palace built by Justine II on “Büyükada”, than known as Prinkipo (island of the prince in 569) During the Byzantine era the island became infamous as a place of exile. Members of the royal family and public figures where often banished to the monastries here.

In the later half of the 19th century, with the auguration of a steam boat service from Istanbul, several wealthy expatriates settled on the islands. Among the foreign exiles to live here was Leon Trotsky.

The 19th century atmosphere is enhanced by the omnipresence of horse driven carriages (phaetons) these quiant carriages are in fact the only form of public transport, as motorized transport is banned. At the top of Büyükada’s wooded south hill, in a clearing, stands the monastery of St. George.
Istanbul is a shopping paradise with the world’s oldest and biggest shopping mall: The Grand Covered Bazaar with 4000 shops under the same roof where one can shop from hand woven carpets to exquisite Ottoman jewellery. Who knows one might even find a flying carpet there!
The modern shopping malls and boutiques are ideal places for trendy ready made dresses and personal gifts of all kinds of international and local names.
**Language**
The Turkish language belongs to Ural - Altaic group and has an affinity to the Finno - Ugrian languages. Turkish is written in Latin alphabet and is spoken by some 150-200 million people around the world.

**Political structure**
The Turkish economy is based on a secular democratic, pluralist and parliamentary system, where law and social justice protect human rights. The national assembly is elected by popular vote and nation is governed by the council of ministers headed by the prime minister. Turkey is a founding member of OECD, the black sea economic cooperation organization, NATO, the Europe council and the European parliament and an associate member of the European community.

**Religion**
99% of the population is Muslim. In the large cities and especially in Istanbul, there are also many churches (catholic, orthodox, Armenian, protestant) and synagogues.

**Economy**
Turkey has become a major tourist destination. With the rapid development of both summer and winter resorts, more and more people from all around the world are able to enjoy the history, culture and beautiful sites of Turkey. Agriculture plays a very important role in Turkish economy. The main crops are wheat, rice, cotton, tea, tobacco, hazelnuts and fruit.

**Customs**
Duty-free allowance: 400 cigarettes, 50 cigars, 200 gr. tobacco; up to 7 bottles of spirit, of 70 cc each, of which not more than three bottles can be of the same kind. Antiques and electronic equipment must be registered in the owner’s passport upon arrival and checked at exit. It is strictly forbidden to take antiques out of the country. For this reason it is necessary to obtain a certificate for carpets or other valuables purchased in the country as proof that it is not an antique.

**Clothing**
The dress is generally informal in Turkey; however for special evenings ladies compete to wear the latest fashion. For the visitors, it is advisable to bring comfortable shoes and pant suits for daytime visits. The organizers can set the tone for the evenings; in any case it is recommended to bring a cocktail dress.

**Time zone**
Turkey is 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, and 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time.

**Electricity**
220 volt, 50 cycle. Most hotels have a receptacle with 110 volts. Socket type is European standards.

**Currency**
The Turkish lira is available in notes and coins. The exchange rate is determined daily; several banks and exchange offices are available. Traveler’s checks can be cashed in most banks. Hotels and many shops and restaurants accept foreign currency. There is no limit to the amount of foreign currency that travelers can bring cash. Hotels, most restaurants and shops accept all major credit cards (American Express, Visa, MasterCard, Euro Card, Diners’ Club).

**Weight and measures**
Turkey uses the metric system for weight and measures.

**Business, banking & shopping hours**
Offices and banks are generally open 9:00 am to 5:00 pm from Monday to Friday, with a break between 12:00 to 1:30 pm.

**Taxis**
Available at taxi stands or hailed on the street. All are yellow and have meters.
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