

ISTANBUL

the ancient Constantinople



DAY 1 / Khartoum – Istanbul by night flight and city sightseeing

Departure from Khartoum airport with Turkish Airline. Arrival at Istanbul airport, meet and greet with your local guide and transfer to your hotel. Breakfast and city tour.

You will proceed discovering the treasures of this amazing city, gateway to the Western and Eastern world. You will visit first the **Basilica Cistern**, an extraordinary subterranean cistern featuring a wildly atmospheric forest of columns (336 to be exact), vaulted brick ceilings, mysterious carved Medusa-head capitals and ghostly patrols of carp. This amazing building is a testament to the ambitious town planning and engineering expertise of the Byzantines. You will visit then **Aya Sofya**, a majestic Byzantine basilica. Built by order of the *Emperor Justinian* in the sixth century AD, its soaring dome, huge nave and glittering gold mosaic contribute to its reputation as one of the world's most beautiful buildings, and its long and fascinating history as church, mosque and museum makes it the city's most revealing time capsule. Looted by marauding Crusaders in the 13th century, stormed by Ottoman invaders during the Conquest in 1453 and visited by millions of tourists since becoming a museum, it is Turkey's greatest treasure.

You will then visit **Topkapi Palace**, an opulent Ottoman palace complex occupying the promontory of Istanbul's Old City. A series of mad, sad and downright bad sultans lived here with their concubines and courtiers between 1465 and 1830, and extravagant relics of their centuries of folly, intrigue, excess, patronage, diplomacy and war are everywhere you look. Highlights include

the huge Harem (private quarters), impressive Imperial Council Chamber, object-laden Imperial Treasury and picturesque Marble Terrace. You will reach then **Hippodrome Park**, the rectangular arena for the chariot races. And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, the **Blue Mosque**, the marvellous world famous project of *Sultan Ahmet I* (1603-1617), whose tomb is located on the north side of the site, facing *Sultanahmet* park. The mosque's wonderfully curvaceous exterior features a cascade of domes and six slender minarets. Blue Iznik tiles adorn the interior and give the building its unofficial but commonly used name. You can visit all these places comfortably on foot.

DAY 2 / Istanbul: City tour and Bosphorus ferry trip (2 hrs)

In the morning you visit the **New Mosque** (Yeni Camii), actually a 400-years-old mosque, dating from 1597. You will reach then the **Spice Bazaar** where vividly coloured spices are displayed alongside jewel-like lokum (Turkish delight) since the Ottoman era. This remains a great place to stock up on edible souvenirs, share a few jokes with the vendors and marvel around the well-preserved building. You will visit now the **Rüstem Paşa Mosque**, a gem nestled in the middle of the busy *Tahtakale* shopping district. Dating from 1560, it was designed by *Sinan* for *Rüstem Paşa*, son-in-law and grand vizier of *Süleyman the Magnificent*. The mosque is a showpiece of the best Ottoman architecture and tile-work. You will walk then across the **Galata Bridge**.

All the visits are on foot. After lunch, you will enjoy a wonderful group **cruise on the Bosphorus**, about 2 hours.

DAY 3 / Kariye Museum – Golden Horn – Fener, Balat, Eyup – Pierre Loti hill

In the morning meet with your guide and driver. Today you will be transferred by minibus. Along the *Marmara* sea, you will reach *Yedi Kule* and following the ancient Constantinople walls you reach the **Kariye Museum** (Chora Church), a gorgeous mosaic-laden church. Nestled in the shadow of *Theodosius II's* monumental land walls and now a museum overseen by the Aya Sofya curators, it receives a fraction of the visitor numbers that its big sister attracts but offers an equally fascinating insight into Byzantine art.

From here you will reach the **Golden Horn** and you'll follow its banks till **Fener** and **Balat** districts, which are today the most authentic part of the European city side. You now visit **Eyup**, the most faithful district in Istanbul, with its cemetery which is a pilgrimage destination due to the Muslim holy men tombs here located. You will enjoy then a wonderful sunset up on the **Pierre Loti hill**.

DAY 4 / Ali Pasa mosque – Istanbul Modern – Dolmabahce palace – Taksim Square – Istiklal Caddesi

In the morning, meet your guide and driver. Today you will be transferred by minibus. You will start with the visit of **Beyoglu**, the most lively district in the European city side, beyond the *Galata Bridge* and the *Golden Horn*. Here you will visit the **Kilic Ali Pasa mosque**, just reopened after a long and detailed restoration, dedicated to an Italian man who reached the highest positions in the Ottoman navy in the XVI century. You reach then **Istanbul Modern**, a modern art museum, then **Dolmabahce Palace**, the last Sultan residence, and **Ortakoy** district.

You leave then the Bosphorus coast to reach **Taksim Square** and cross the pedestrian **Istiklal Caddesi**, pulsating heart of the European Istanbul. You will cross Cukurcuma, interesting district rich in art galleries, antique and vintage shops, where *Oran Pamuk* locates his book “*The Museum of Innocence*” and where there is an homonymous museum, and you will reach then the **Galata Tower**.

For the Istanbul lovers who would like to spend one day more in this magical city...

DAY 5 / Princes' Islands (according to weather conditions and time of the year)

A great day trip with a very enjoyable ferry ride and walks without cars around. Early morning departure in order to spend the whole morning on *Heybeliada* island and the afternoon on *Büyükkada* island (or vice versa). **Heybeliada** is popular with day visitors who came here to walk in the pine groves and swim from the tiny beaches. The island's major landmark is the hilltop *Haghia Triada Monastery*, which is perched above a picturesque line of poplar trees in a spot that has been occupied by a Greek monastery since Byzantine times. **Büyükkada**, the largest island in the group, is impressive with its gingerbread villas climbing up the slopes of the hill and the bulbous twin cupolas of the *Splendid Otel* providing an unique landmark. The ferry terminal is an attractive building in the Ottoman revival style, dated 1899. The island's main draw card is the *Greek Orthodox Monastery of St. George*, located in the ‘saddle’ between *Büyükkada*'s two highest hills.

or

DAY 5 / The Bosphorus and Eastern Istanbul

In the morning you will visit the **Rumeli Hisari** (*Fortress of Europe*) and the **Sakip Sabanci Museum**, which hosts international travelling art exhibitions. You will cross then the bridge which connects Asia and Europe to reach the **Camlica hill** and descend to **Kadikoy** and **Üsküdar** districts to visit one of the most beautiful mosques designed by *Sinan* architect. Here you will enjoy a wonderful sunset on the *Golden Horn*, from the Asian bank.

Optional extra activities to check the availability in loco:

- local dance and music show
- Private flight on the Bosphorus (1hr.)
- Whirling *Dervishes* ceremony