

THE İSTANBUL EXPERIENCE GUIDE

AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES FOR POSITIVE LOCAL IMPACT

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WELCOME TO İSTANBUL!

“If the Earth were a single state,
İstanbul would be its capital.”
Napoleon Bonaparte

İstanbul is a city of extraordinary layers — where history, creativity, and daily life meet across neighborhoods, shores, and communities.

As İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, we are guided by a long-term vision of a Fair, Resilient, and Creative İstanbul. This means working toward a city that is more livable, more balanced, and more inclusive — for residents and visitors alike.

In tourism, this vision translates into a commitment to long-term viability, cultural vitality, and shared heritage. We believe that İstanbul’s richness is not confined to a few iconic sites, but lives throughout the city — in its local markets, artistic communities, waterfront districts, historic streets, and evolving neighborhoods.

Through our collaboration with the Good Travel Alliance, we aim to support a form of tourism that strengthens local life, protects cultural and natural heritage, and encourages meaningful experiences for travelers.

It is our pleasure to welcome you to İstanbul.

We invite you to explore thoughtfully, discover widely, and experience the city with curiosity and care.

Hüseyin Gazi Coşan
Director of Tourism
İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality



EXPERIENCE İSTANBUL WITH POSITIVE LOCAL IMPACT

İstanbul is not a city you simply visit as an average city trip. This is a city where you take the time to experience something else every hour of the day and night: in the rhythm of ferries crossing the Bosphorus, in neighborhood markets at dawn, in the quiet rituals of tea houses, artisans' workshops, and waterfront life.

These are not tours. They are trusted recommendations that help you step beyond mass tourism and into the living city.

Whether guided or self-directed, every entry in this guide shares the same purpose: to strengthen local livelihoods, preserve living traditions, and encourage meaningful, responsible travel in İstanbul.

**I truly hope you will experience İstanbul,
discover its soul,
and fall in love ♡**

*Alper Ertubey,
Hike'n Sail Türkiye*



**THE İSTANBUL
EXPERIENCE GUIDE**

www.goodtravel.guide

THIS IS **NOT A TYPICAL** TRAVEL GUIDE

Travel is not only about seeing a place; it is about how you experience it, and the impact you leave behind.

The Good Travel Experience (GTE) concept was developed to offer a different way of exploring destinations: one that creates value not only for visitors, but also for local communities and the places themselves.

By encouraging travelers to go beyond the most visited landmarks, into neighborhoods, local businesses, and everyday life, this approach **helps distribute tourism more evenly** and **invites visitors to stay longer**, ideally for at least a week, to fully experience the destination's diversity. It also **supports small, locally rooted initiatives, reduces pressure on crowded areas, and contributes to more balanced and resilient destinations**, while addressing key challenges such as overtourism, undertourism, seasonality, uneven visitor flows, and the decline of local communities.

When travel flows differently, everyone benefits:

- Visitors enjoy more responsible and authentic experiences.
- Residents experience a more balanced relationship with tourism.
- Destinations become more resilient and better prepared for the future.

This guide, the first in a series focused on good travel, invites you to experience not only the heart of a destination, but also its veins. It encourages you to:

- Follow a **low-emission plan for a day** to make the most of your time while exploring the destination more responsibly.
- Go beyond the highlights and explore everyday life in **different neighborhoods**.
- **Slow down** your pace to connect more deeply with places, people, and culture.
- Choose local by **supporting small businesses**, artisans, and community initiatives.
- Move responsibly by walking, using public transport, and **reducing your footprint**.
- **Engage mindfully with local traditions**, spaces, and communities.



WARNING: Traveling, city trips, bucket lists and social media are addictive. This guide may lead to an addiction to Good Travel Experiences, so proceed at your own risk 😊
For now we are only planning a handful Experience Guides, so we won't create a bucket... Or should we? We depend on your support to create more. Check the last pages of this guide for further details.

TWO WAYS, ONE JOURNEY

The **Istanbul Experience Guide** invites you to discover the city through experiences that reflect its living culture: places where craftsmanship continues, food traditions are preserved, and local communities remain at the heart of the story. Inside these pages, you will find two complementary ways to explore İstanbul.

EXPLORE LIKE A LOCAL

A carefully curated selection of **places suggested by residents, based on positive local reputation**, offering an authentic perspective of the city. This list includes locally rooted spots you can explore at your own pace, from family-run eateries and traditional hammams to markets, artisan workshops, hidden streets, ferry routes, island escapes, and cultural spaces that reveal the many layers of İstanbul. Part of these independent discoveries are organized into geographic clusters, inviting you to experience the city neighborhood by neighborhood.

GOOD TRAVEL EXPERIENCES (GTE)

Alongside these curated routes, the guide presents a selection of small-scale experiences led by the tour guides of Hike'n Sail Türkiye, a tour operator certified by Travelife and independently assessed within the Good Travel Alliance framework. These guided experiences connect visitors with neighborhoods, culinary traditions, artisans, and local voices; always designed with respect for local communities and the surrounding environment, including measures to reduce and offset carbon emissions and to support small businesses.

Each GTE included in this guide has been independently reviewed by a Good Travel Alliance expert using a framework of 20 criteria developed to recognize responsible tourism practices. The percentage score (GTE Scan) shown for each Good Travel Experience reflects how strongly the activity meets these criteria, highlighting initiatives that actively contribute to local livelihoods, cultural continuity, and responsible environmental practices.

Our Quality Commitment: *Unlike AI-generated guides that scrape the web, every experience in this guide has been personally visited, assessed, and verified by our local experts to ensure it meets global positive local impact standards. This is a Human-Led, Verified 'Chain of Assurance' for the conscious traveler.*

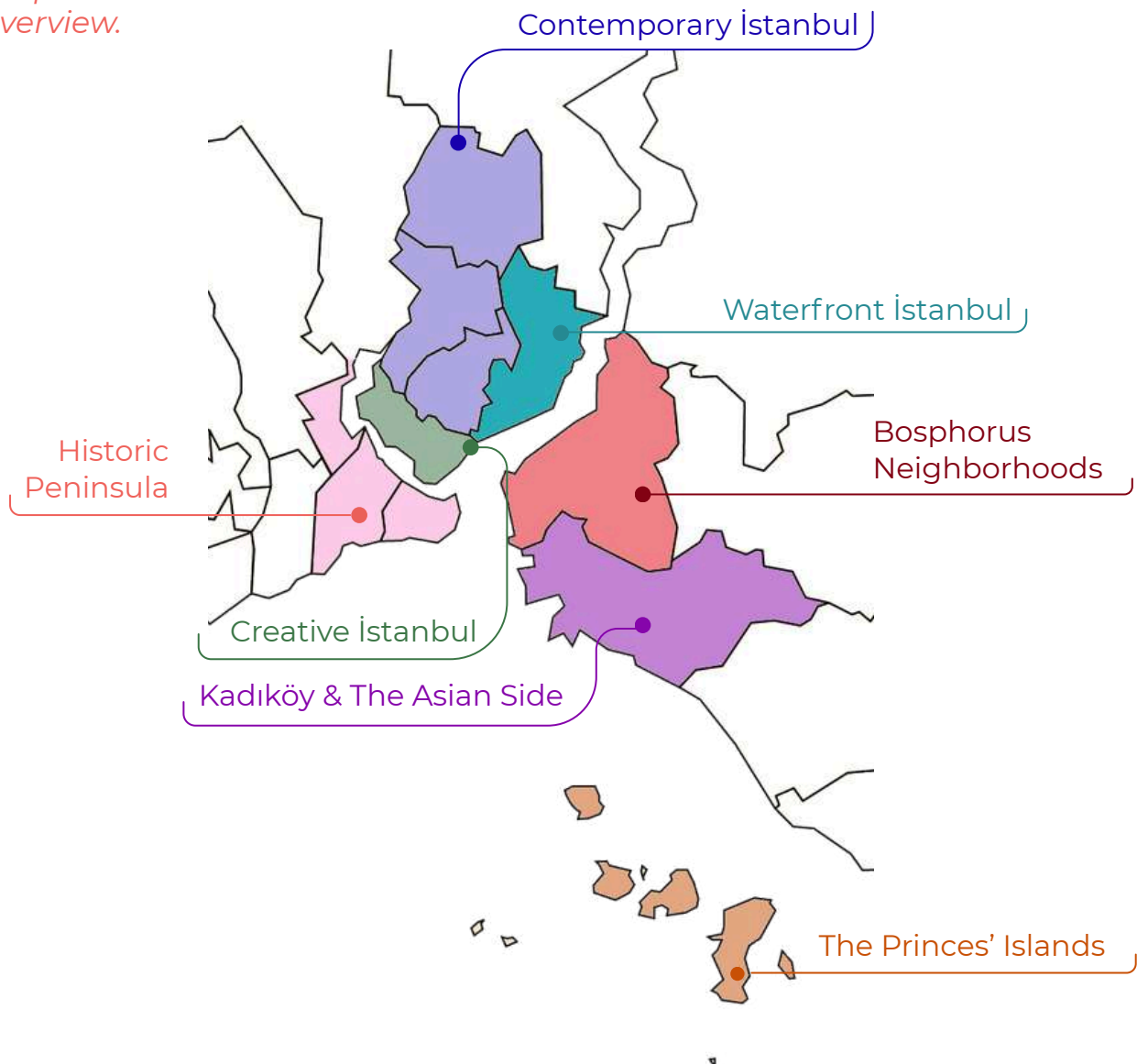
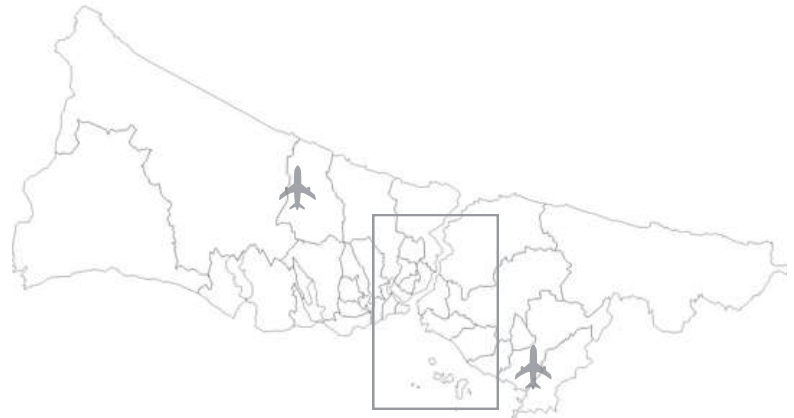
Safety Notice: *As in any major city, we encourage travelers to stay aware of their surroundings and take general precautions throughout their visit. Keep personal belongings secure, especially in busy areas, and follow local guidelines where applicable. Travel conditions may vary, so using your own judgment is always recommended. **In case of emergencies during your stay in İstanbul, please dial 112.***

THE MANY FACES OF İSTANBUL

Independent discoveries are organized into geographic clusters to guide your exploration.

Good Travel Experiences also indicate where they take place.

Take a look at the map for a visual overview.



For the location of all Good Travel Experiences, see the web version in <https://goodtravel.guide/istanbul>.



EXPLORE LIKE A LOCAL

İSTANBUL

FOR THE **INDEPENDENT** TRAVELER

This section is designed for travelers who value flexibility, independence, and a more thoughtful way of exploring İstanbul. It encourages a slower pace, giving visitors the opportunity to spend more time in each place, discover lesser-known areas, and engage more deeply with the destination through mindful choices.

Rather than focusing only on major highlights, this approach invites visitors to experience İstanbul beyond the surface, balancing iconic sites with quieter routes and everyday local settings, while contributing to a more balanced and positive experience for both the city and its communities.

VISITOR PROFILE

This section is for you if you are:

- An independent, self-paced traveler
- Curious to explore beyond the main tourist routes
- Interested in deeper cultural engagement
- Looking for flexibility over structured group tours
- And most of all, mindful of your impact and engaged in a more conscious way of traveling

For those who prefer more structure or have limited experience with independent travel, we recommend exploring the curated **Good Travel Experiences** featured in this guide. These are delivered by well-established, experienced operators with strong local expertise, offering carefully designed itineraries that provide additional support and guidance while maintaining a high-quality and authentic experience.

VISITOR FLOW AND SEASONALITY

Visitor demand in İstanbul varies throughout the year, with peak periods typically occurring between April and June and September to October, when weather conditions are most favorable. The summer months, particularly July and August, also see high visitor numbers, especially in central areas such as Sultanahmet and other historic sites. In contrast, winter offers a quieter atmosphere and a more relaxed pace of exploration.

Within each day, peak visiting times generally occur between late morning and mid-afternoon, when major landmarks are at their busiest. Visiting early in the morning or later in the afternoon, and considering alternative routes, can significantly improve the overall experience while helping to distribute visitor flows more evenly across the city..

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR VISIT TO İSTANBUL

Before exploring İstanbul more fully, a little preparation can help you make the most of your experience. With this in mind, our local host **Alper Ertübey** has put together a set of practical tips so you can arrive informed and ready to experience the city with awareness and respect. Below, you'll find a selection of key tips to get you started. For more details, please click [here](#).

Weather:

- İstanbul has warm summers and cooler winters, with occasional rain.
- Spring is ideal for exploring mild and generally dry weather, especially in May and September.
- If you're exploring routes near the Bosphorus, it's a good idea to bring a light jacket.

Entry requirements

- Check [visa requirements](#) for your nationality before traveling.
- Make sure your passport validity meets Turkey's entry regulations.

Health

- No specific vaccinations are generally required for travel to Turkey.
- It is always advisable to check current health recommendations before departure.
- Travel insurance is recommended to cover medical assistance and unexpected situations during your trip.

Moving around

- İstanbul has an extensive public transport network including metro, tram, bus, and ferry.
- Tram T1 connects most major historic sights and Metro M2 connects to Taksim and Şişli without traffic issues.
- Ferries are often one of the most scenic ways to travel between neighborhoods.
- Both airports are well connected to the city center by public transport, with metro lines and airport shuttle buses available.
- The [İstanbulkart](#) is commonly used across different transport systems.

If you'd like to learn more about traveling to İstanbul and the experiences you can have there beyond the information provided in this guide, you can connect with one of İstanbul's knowledgeable local guides from Hike'n Sail [here](#). Now, let your journey through İstanbul's neighborhoods begin.

HISTORIC PENINSULA

Heritage and Imperial İstanbul

Fatih • Sultanahmet • Sirkeci • Balat



Byzantine and Ottoman legacies converge in the Historic Peninsula, where mosques, markets, palaces, and narrow streets reveal the layers of İstanbul's rich history.

At the heart of the Historic Peninsula lies Sultanahmet, where the domes of **Hagia Sophia** and the **Sultan Ahmed Camii (Blue Mosque)** rise opposite each other across the city's historic ceremonial square. Nearby, the **Yerebatan Sarnıcı (Basilica Cistern)** reveals the underground world of Byzantine Constantinople, while **Topkapı Sarayı (Topkapı Palace)** and the **Great Palace Mosaics Museum** offer glimpses into the imperial lives of sultans and emperors.

From Sultanahmet, the streets descend toward Eminönü, where grand monuments give way to the energy of historic markets. The **Kapalıçarşı (Grand Bazaar)** unfolds as a maze of workshops and trading lanes, while the nearby **Mısır Çarşısı (Spice Bazaar)** fills the air with aromas of saffron, teas, dried fruits, and Turkish delight, a reminder of the city's centuries-old trading routes.

A short uphill walk from the Spice Bazaar leads to **Süleymaniye Camii (Süleymaniye Mosque)**, one of the masterpieces of the Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan. Its expansive courtyards overlook the Golden Horn, offering one of the most peaceful viewpoints in the historic center.

Beyond the major landmarks, the Historic Peninsula reveals quieter layers of the city. In neighborhoods such as Balat and Fener, colorful Ottoman houses, historic churches, synagogues, and neighborhood cafés reflect centuries of multicultural life. Nearby, the **Kariye Camii (Chora Church)** preserves some of İstanbul's most remarkable Byzantine mosaics and frescoes, powerful reminders of the city's Byzantine past.



Arriving in Sultanahmet early in the morning allows you to experience the area before the largest crowds arrive. Begin by taking the Tram T1 to Sultanahmet and continue on foot.

The Kapalıçarşı and Mısır Çarşısı are usually quieter before 11AM or after 4PM. Crowds peak on weekends.

Late afternoon visits to Süleymaniye often mean calmer courtyards and beautiful views over the Golden Horn.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Amira: a family-run boutique hotel in Sultanahmet, known for its warm hospitality, attentive guest engagement, and tailored local recommendations that help guests connect more deeply with the city.

CREATIVE İSTANBUL

Culture, Arts and Nightlife in Beyoğlu

Taksim • Galata • Karaköy • Cihangir



If İstanbul has a creative pulse, it beats in Beyoğlu. For generations artists, writers, and musicians have gathered here, and its streets still pulse with galleries, workshops, cafés, and independent creative spaces.

Walking through Galata and Karaköy, restored stone buildings now house design studios, bookshops, and neighborhood cafés where locals and visitors mingle throughout the day. Rising above the district, the medieval **Galata Kulesi (Galata Tower)** overlooks a maze of narrow streets leading down toward the Bosphorus.

Along the waterfront, **İstanbul Modern** anchors the city's contemporary art scene while contributing to the revitalization of the historic port area. Nearby, **Pera Museum** offers another perspective on the city's artistic heritage through exhibitions and cultural programs.

Creative traditions remain an essential part of the neighborhood's identity. At **Galatart Ebru Atelier**, visitors can experience the centuries old art of Ebru marbling, where pigments float across water before being transferred onto paper.

A similar experience can be found in mosaic lamp workshops offered by different studios across Galata, where visitors design their own lamps using traditional techniques and colorful glass pieces. Guided by local artisans, the process offers a hands-on introduction to Turkish craftsmanship while creating a meaningful, self-made object.

Participating in workshops like these helps sustain traditional crafts and the artisans who keep them alive.



Visiting Galata Kulesi early in the morning helps avoid long elevator queues.

The historic Karaköy-Tünel funicular is a convenient way to move between Karaköy and the hilltop streets of Beyoğlu while reducing the uphill walk.

WHERE TO STAY

Ruz Hotels: set in a restored 19th-century building, this boutique hotel offers a blend of historic character and a vibrant, creative atmosphere.

DeCamondo Galata Hotel: a boutique hotel in a restored historic building in Galata, encouraging exploration of the neighborhood's food and cultural scene on foot.

WATERFRONT İSTANBUL

Bosphorus Lifestyle

Beşiktaş · Ortaköy · Arnavutköy · Bebek · Kuruçeşme



Neighborhoods such as Beşiktaş, Ortaköy, Arnavutköy, and Bebek offer some of the most scenic walks in the city. Ottoman wooden mansions line the shoreline, fishing boats bob gently in small harbors, and cafés spill onto terraces overlooking the water. Public squares in Ortaköy and Bebek often fill with locals enjoying tea, street food, and wide views across the Bosphorus. Nearby, the **Beşiktaş Çarşısı (Beşiktaş Market)** fills surrounding streets with stalls where residents browse fresh vegetables, textiles, and street food, often at lower prices.

WHERE TO STAY

The Public Ortaköy: a boutique stay combining historic architecture with a refined, contemporary feel, reflecting the layered character of İstanbul's iconic waterfront neighborhoods.

CONTEMPORARY İSTANBUL

Shopping and Modern City

Şişli · Nişantaşı · Levent · Maslak



In Nişantaşı, elegant boulevards lined with boutique shops, cafés, and galleries invite visitors to wander. Stylish storefronts, leafy streets, and terrace cafés reflect a refined side of İstanbul's modern urban lifestyle. Yet even within these contemporary neighborhoods, traditional markets remain an important part of everyday life. At the **Feriköy Organik Pazarı (Feriköy Organic Market)**, farmers gather each weekend to sell seasonal produce, cheeses, olive oils, and other locally produced goods, creating a direct connection between rural producers and the city.

WHERE TO STAY

Four Points by Sheraton İstanbul Kağıthane: a Green Key certified hotel combining modern amenities with energy and water efficiency features and a waste management program.

KADIKÖY & THE ASIAN SIDE

Alternative Culture

Kadıköy • Moda • Yeldeğirmeni • Fenerbahçe



The **Kadıköy Boğa Heykeli (Kadıköy Bull Statue)**, one of the district's most recognizable landmarks, is a popular meeting point reflecting the neighborhood's energy. Nearby, **Kadıköy Çarşısı (Kadıköy Market)** draws locals throughout the day, with fishmongers, bakeries, delicatessens, and spice shops filling its narrow streets and making it one of the city's most vibrant food hubs. A short walk away, Yeldeğirmeni stands out for its colorful murals and creative scene, while Moda, by the waterfront, offers a quieter rhythm with seaside parks, and the historic **Moda İskelesi (Moda Pier)** overlooking the Marmara Sea.

WHERE TO STAY

[İkiz Konak Boutique Hotel](#): a small boutique hotel set in a carefully restored historic house, offering a calm and intimate stay with a strong sense of place, residential charm, and a thoughtful approach to local hospitality.

BOSPHORUS NEIGHBORHOODS

Authentic Local Life & Slow İstanbul

Üsküdar • Kuzguncuk • Çengelköy



For travelers seeking a quieter side of İstanbul, small neighborhoods along the Bosphorus reveal a slower rhythm of waterfront walks, neighborhood cafés, and long-standing food traditions. This slower pace of life is reflected in the neighborhood's traditional hammams, which continue to serve local communities. **Ağa Hamamı** represents classical Ottoman typology with an intimate, functional atmosphere. **Şifa Hamamı**, a historic neighborhood bath, preserves the traditional layout and is known for its local, authentic feel compared to more touristic alternatives.

WHERE TO STAY

[Bosphorus Bridge Hotel](#): a small-scale stay offering a more local and residential experience, with a simple and welcoming atmosphere shaped by everyday life along the Bosphorus.

THE PRINCES' ISLANDS

Nature & Leisure

Büyükkada • Heybeliada • Burgazada • Kınalıada



A short ferry ride from İstanbul, the Princes' Islands reveal a quieter side of the city, where car free streets, seaside promenades, and historic villas create a slower island rhythm.

Scattered across the Sea of Marmara just south of the city, the Princes' Islands, known locally as Adalar, form a small archipelago long used as a seasonal retreat from İstanbul's urban pace. Elegant late Ottoman era mansions line leafy streets, while waterfront cafés and quiet coves frame wide views across the sea. Ferries connect the islands daily with both the European and Asian shores, making them a popular escape for mainland residents seeking fresh air and a slower rhythm of life.

The largest island, Büyükkada, is often the main gateway to the archipelago. Around the lively ferry square, cafés and small restaurants overlook the harbor, while shaded streets lead toward pine covered hills and scenic coastal paths. A walk or bicycle ride around the island reveals quiet swimming spots and viewpoints across the Sea of Marmara, while the hilltop **Aya Yorgi Manastırı (Aya Yorgi Monastery)** offers one of the most sweeping panoramas in the region.

Nearby Heybeliada feels more residential, with forested slopes and historic institutions overlooking the water. Smaller islands like Burgazada and Kınalıada offer an even quieter village atmosphere, where daily life unfolds around waterfront promenades, neighborhood cafés, and small local markets.



Ferries to the islands depart regularly from Eminönü Ferry Terminal, Kabataş Ferry Terminal, and Kadıköy Ferry Terminal.

Early morning departures are usually quieter, especially on weekends when many İstanbul residents visit the islands.



The absence of private cars shapes the character of the islands. Visitors move mainly on foot or by bicycle, creating a calmer way to experience the landscape while helping reduce their carbon footprint.

HOW DOES A **TOP 10** SIGHT BECOME A DELIGHT?

Istanbul's historic core is compact, walkable, and well connected by trams, metro, and ferries. With a bit of planning, you can experience the city's most popular attractions while avoiding crowds, traffic, and unnecessary emissions.

Sultanahmet: Hagia Sophia, Sultan Ahmed Camii (Blue Mosque), Yerebatan Sarnıcı (Basilica Cistern), Topkapı Sarayı (Topkapı Palace)

- Arrive at opening time (usually 09:00).
- Take Tram T1 to Sultanahmet and explore on foot.
- Visit Topkapı Palace after 15:30 for quieter courtyards.

Kapalıçarşı (Grand Bazaar) & Mısır Çarşısı (Spice Bazaar)

- Best visited before 11:00 or after 16:00.
- Walk from Sultanahmet (15 minutes) or take Tram T1 to Beyazıt (Grand Bazaar) or Eminönü (Spice Bazaar).
- Avoid weekends when crowds peak.

Süleymaniye Camii (Süleymaniye Mosque)

- Walk uphill from the Spice Bazaar (10–12 minutes).
- Late afternoon offers calm courtyards and Golden Horn views.
- Avoid prayer times; mid-afternoon is usually quiet.

Galata & Karaköy: Galata Kulesi (Galata Tower), Istanbul Modern & Pera Museum

- Walk across Galata Bridge from Eminönü.
- Visit Galata Tower at opening time to avoid elevator queues.
- Use the Karaköy–Tünel funicular to reduce uphill walking.
- For Istanbul Modern, take Tram T1 to Tophane; for Pera Museum, walk or use the funicular.



A LOW-EMISSION PLAN FOR A DAY

Now that you've had a glimpse of what İstanbul has to offer and might be wondering where to start, here's a one-day route to help you get going. Designed to balance discovery and comfort, this itinerary minimizes emissions, avoids peak crowds, and keeps walking distances manageable, while still covering some of İstanbul's most iconic sights.

- 09:00** Hagia Sophia & Sultan Ahmed Mosque (Blue Mosque)
- 10:30** Yerebatan Sarnıcı (Basilica Cistern)
- 12:00** Lunch in Sultanahmet or Gülhane
- 13:00** Mısır Çarşısı (Spice Bazaar) → walk to Süleymaniye Mosque
- 16:00** Ferry to Karaköy → Galata Kulesi (Galata Tower)
- 17:30** İstanbul Modern or Pera Museum
- 19:00** Dinner in Karaköy or Beyoğlu

The route is supported by efficient public transport, with the T1 tram connecting most major historic sights and the M2 metro providing quick access to areas such as Taksim and Şişli without traffic delays.

A FEW WORDS IN TURKISH

Learning a few simple Turkish words can make everyday interactions more meaningful during your visit. Even small gestures like saying *merhaba* (hello) or *teşekkür ederim* (thank you) are appreciated and help show respect for the local culture. These expressions can open friendly exchanges and create warmer connections with the people you meet along the way.

- Hello: Merhaba (MEHR-hah-bah)
- Good morning: Günaydın (gew-NAHY-duhn)
- Good evening: İyi akşamlar (EE-yee ak-SHAM-lar)
- Thank you: Teşekkür ederim (teh-sheh-KYOOR eh-deh-reem)
- Please: Lütfen (LUUT-fen)
- Yes: Evet (EH-vet)
- No: Hayır (HAH-yuhr)
- Excuse me: Affedersiniz (ah-feh-dehr-see-NEEZ)
- How much is this?: Bu ne kadar? (boo neh kah-DAHR)

WHERE İSTANBUL EATS

Food in İstanbul is more than a meal. It is a way of understanding the city. From early morning bakeries to late-night kitchens, flavors reflect centuries of movement, memory, and everyday life. These recommendations come from the local community, highlighting places with cultural or historical significance, where recipes and rituals continue to be part of daily routines, and your visit directly supports the people and stories behind them.

Rather than a fixed list, think of this as an invitation to explore. The suggestions are color coded by neighborhood to help you navigate and find what suits your moment. Whether it is a small bakery, a traditional tea house, or a family-run restaurant, each is shaped by time, place, and tradition.

HISTORIC PENINSULA

Click on
each card
to learn
more.



Kitel İmmi

Esnaf Lokantası (Family-Run Restaurant)

Where: Fatih

A Lady-run restaurant with authentic meals named by her.

Buuzecedi

Esnaf Lokantası (Family-Run Restaurant)

Where: Fatih

Owned by a Syrian migrant family, who came to İstanbul due to war.



Photo source: Buuzecedi

Day Day Pastanesi

Special Bakery / Confectionary / Patisserie

Where: Beyazıt

Very popular among the locals. Apple cookies and Tahini cookies are worth waiting in line.



Photo source: Day Day
Pastanesi

Vefa Bozacısı

Boza Shop

Where: Süleymaniye

Boza is a traditional sweet Turkish drink, made of fermented millet. Vefa Bozacısı is a historic spot for trying this drink, offering interesting stories along.



Photo source: Vefa Bozacısı

WHERE İSTANBUL EATS

CREATIVE İSTANBUL

Lades Menemen

Esnaf Lokantası (Family-Run Restaurant)
Where: Beyoğlu
An iconic spot in Beyoğlu district.



Photo source: Lades Menemen

Nato Restaurant

Esnaf Lokantası (Family-Run Restaurant)
Where: Karaköy
It has been serving traditional Turkish cuisine since 1952.



Photo source: Nato Restaurant

Mandabatmaz Coffee Shop

Local Café / Tea House
Where: Beyoğlu; İstiklal Avenue
An iconic coffee operating since 1967.



Photo source: Mandabatmaz
Coffee Shop

Karaköy Çorba Evi

Çorbacı (Soup Restaurant)
Where: Karaköy
Various types of soups from all different parts of Turkey.



Photo source: Karaköy Çorba Evi

Karaköy Ferry Terminal Cafe

Local Café / Tea House
Where: Karaköy
İstanbul's ferry terminals embody the city's maritime spirit, with the rooftop of Karaköy Terminal transformed into a vibrant bookstore and café.



Photo source: Karaköy Ferry
Terminal Café

WHERE İSTANBUL EATS

Sabırtaşı Restaurant

Esnaf Lokantası (Family-Run Restaurant)

Where: Asmalı Mescit, İstiklal Cd. No: 112, 34430 Beyoğlu/İstanbul

Website: <https://www.sabirtasi.com.tr>

Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/sabirtasirestoran>

The story begins with Ali Topçuoğlu, born in Kahramanmaraş in 1969. After his family relocated to İstanbul in the late 1980s due to economic hardship, Ali, like many migrants, adapted by selling food on the city's streets. His wife prepared traditional recipes at home, and he sold them with care on İstiklal Caddesi. They began with içli köfte (Turkish stuffed bulgur balls, known as kibbeh in Arabic), sold from a modest street stall; a dish that quickly built a loyal following for its quality, balanced spices, and rich flavor.

The name “Sabırtaşı” (literally “stone of patience”) reflects Ali Bey’s perseverance and resilience — the patience required to build a life and a business step by step, with consistency and dedication.

- Ali Bey’s daily presence at his cart and later in the restaurant made him a recognizable İstanbul figure; he wore his white apron with pride and greeted guests with personal warmth.
- His son, Mustafa Topçuoğlu, continued the legacy after his passing, preserving both the recipes and the ethos of the restaurant, turning his father’s practice into a family tradition and a living piece of İstanbul street food history.
- The story of Sabırtaşı has been featured in discussions of İstanbul’s food culture and even in university talks about entrepreneurship and resilience.

The food is as much about story and heritage as it is about flavor.



Photos by Sabırtaşı Restaurant

WHERE İSTANBUL EATS

WATERFRONT İSTANBUL

7-8 Hasanpaşa Fırını

Special Bakery / Confectionary / Patisserie

Where: Beşiktaş

Located in a narrow side street next to the Beşiktaş Fish Market, this bakery stands across from a historic stone house dated 1903. Founded by the Ottoman-era figure 7-8 Hasan Paşa, it has been operated by the same family for over a century. It is a site deeply rooted in local history, best known for its traditional almond cookies (acıbadem kurabiyesi)



Photo source: 7-8 Hasanpaşa Fırını

Adem Baba

Fish Restaurant

Where: Arnavutköy

Family business since 1992, it is located in an old Ottoman style wooden house. No alcohol.



Photo source: Adem Baba

CONTEMPORARY İSTANBUL

Madam Despina

Meyhane (Turkish Tavern)

Where: Feriköy

The first woman-owned tavern in İstanbul.



Photo source: Madam Despina

Üstün Palmie Patisserie

Special Bakery / Confectionary / Patisserie

Where: Kurtuluş Caddesi

Located between Kurtuluş and Feriköy, Üstün Palmie Pastanesi is a landmark of İstanbul's multicultural heritage. Known for its traditional mastic gum Easter buns (çörek), it remains a "sweet address" preserving the neighborhood's shared history and flavors despite rapid change.



Photo source: Üstün Palmie Patisserie

WHERE İSTANBUL EATS

KADIKÖY & THE ASIAN SIDE

Dondurmacı Ali Usta

Special Bakery / Confectionary / Patisserie

Where: Moda

Ice cream becomes a social ritual, where locals gather for creative flavors made with natural ingredients, especially during evening walks by the sea.



Photo source: Dondurmacı Ali Usta

İskender İskenderoğlu

FaEsnaf Lokantası (Family-Run Restaurant)

Where: Kadıköy

Originating from the 19th-century innovation of İskender Efendi in Bursa, this lineage continues to uphold the authentic preparation of İskender kebab, reflecting the evolution of Ottoman culinary culture into modern Turkish gastronomy. *The family proudly claims the invention of vertically cut "Döner" kebab, known to many worldwide.*



Photo source: İskender İskenderoğlu

Fazıl Bey Turkish Coffee Shop

Local Café / Tea House

Where: Kadıköy

Founded in 1923, Fazıl Bey'in Türk Kahvesi preserves the traditional Turkish coffee ritual: fresh roasting, grinding on-site, and serving in its simplest form, while continuing the role of the coffeehouse as a social meeting point.



Photo source: Fazıl Bey Turkish Coffee Shop

Koço Restaurant

Meyhane (Turkish Tavern)

Where: Kadıköy

Koço Restaurant represents the continuation of İstanbul's seaside meyhane tradition, shaped by the city's Greek (Rum) heritage and long-standing fish and meze culture.



Photo source: Koço Restaurant

WHERE İSTANBUL EATS

Şerbetçi Ali Baba

Local Café / Tea House

Where: Kadıköy

Şerbetçi Ali Baba is a small, traditional sherbet shop in Kadıköy that specializes in historic Ottoman-style beverages. It represents a continuity of non-alcoholic, herbal, and fruit-based drinks that were central to Ottoman urban life. Unlike modern cafés, it focuses on a limited but culturally specific menu of seasonal and historical sherbets.



Photo source: Şerbetçi Ali Baba

Ali Muhiddin Hacı Bekir

Special Bakery / Confectionery / Patisserie

Where: Kadıköy

Established in 1777, this historic confectioner helped shape the evolution of lokum and Ottoman sweets, becoming an official supplier to the palace and a lasting symbol of İstanbul's confectionery heritage.



Photo source: Ali Muhiddin Hacı Bekir

Çiya Restaurant

Esnaf Lokantası (Family-Run Restaurant)

Where: Kadıköy

Çiya is dedicated to preserving traditional home cooking and regional food heritage. Many of its ingredients are grown organically on the restaurant's own farm, located approximately 50 km outside İstanbul, ensuring traceability and seasonal integrity. Çiya also publishes a Food & Culture journal every three months, creating an ongoing platform to document, discuss, and sustain culinary knowledge that might otherwise disappear.



Photo source: Çiya Restaurant

Moda Tea Garden

Local Café / Tea House

Where: Moda

Public tea garden on the tip of Moda Peninsula. Moda Çay Bahçesi is part of İstanbul's traditional tea garden culture, offering an open, democratic social space where locals gather by the sea to share time, conversation, and simple pleasures.



Photo source: Moda Tea Garden

WHERE İSTANBUL EATS

BOSPHORUS NEIGHBORHOODS

Tarihi Çınaraltı Çay Bahçesi

Local Café / Tea House

Where: Çengelköy

At Tarihi Çınaraltı Çay Bahçesi (Historic Plane Tree Tea Garden), the simple ritual of tea becomes a living expression of Bosphorus life, where locals gather under centuries-old trees to pause, connect, and watch the city flow by.



Photo source: Tarihi Çınaraltı Çay Bahçesi

SGK Üsküdar Social Facility

Local Café / Tea House

Where: Üsküdar

A simple waterfront café in Üsküdar run by SGK, where affordable dining meets a social mission, supporting retired citizens and offering an inclusive space where locals gather by the Bosphorus. A pasha-like experience for the working class people.



Photo source: SGK Üsküdar Social Facility

Öz Bolu Lokantası

Esnaf Lokantası (Family-Run Restaurant)

Where: Üsküdar

Here, the tradition of the “esnaf lokantası” lives on, offering simple, freshly prepared home-style dishes in a setting shaped by daily local life and long-standing regulars. 23 daily dishes and traditional desserts. Signature: İncir Uyumması (unique to the restaurant)



Photo source: Öz Bolu Lokantası

İsmet Baba Restaurant

Meyhane (Turkish Tavern)

Where: Kuzguncuk

Iconic spot on the Bosphorus. At İsmet Baba, the rakı table becomes a social ritual shaped by Kuzguncuk’s close-knit, multi-cultural community, where locals, regulars, and stories come together by the Bosphorus.



Photo source: İsmet Baba Restaurant

WHERE İSTANBUL EATS

PRINCES' ISLANDS

Lunapark Restaurant

Esnaf Lokantası (Family-Run Restaurant)

Where: Büyükkada

Located in the heart of Büyükkada, in a setting surrounded by nature. Serving traditional Turkish dishes, simple and very idyllic.



Photo source: Lunapark Restaurant

Prinkipo Meyhane

Meyhane (Turkish Tavern)

Where: Büyükkada

A beloved spot for island locals and regulars, where Fıstık Ahmet's warm and charismatic presence brings people together and stories are shared over rakı and meze.



Photo source: Prinkipo Meyhane

Yücepete Kır Gazinosu (Aya Yorgi Hill)

Esnaf Lokantası (Family-Run Restaurant)

Where: Büyükkada

Country BBQ restaurant. Located next to the highest point of the island, next to Aya Yorgi Church. Accessed by a very steep walk which is rewarded an amazing view of the whole İstanbul when the weather is clear. Run by the family who takes care of the St. George Church.



Photo source: Yücepete Kır Gazinosu

Kalpazankaya Restaurant

Meyhane (Turkish Tavern)

Where: Burgazada

Operating as a family business since 1959, it takes its name from the "kalpazanlar" (counterfeiters) who, according to local lore, once minted coins on the windswept rocks of this peninsula.

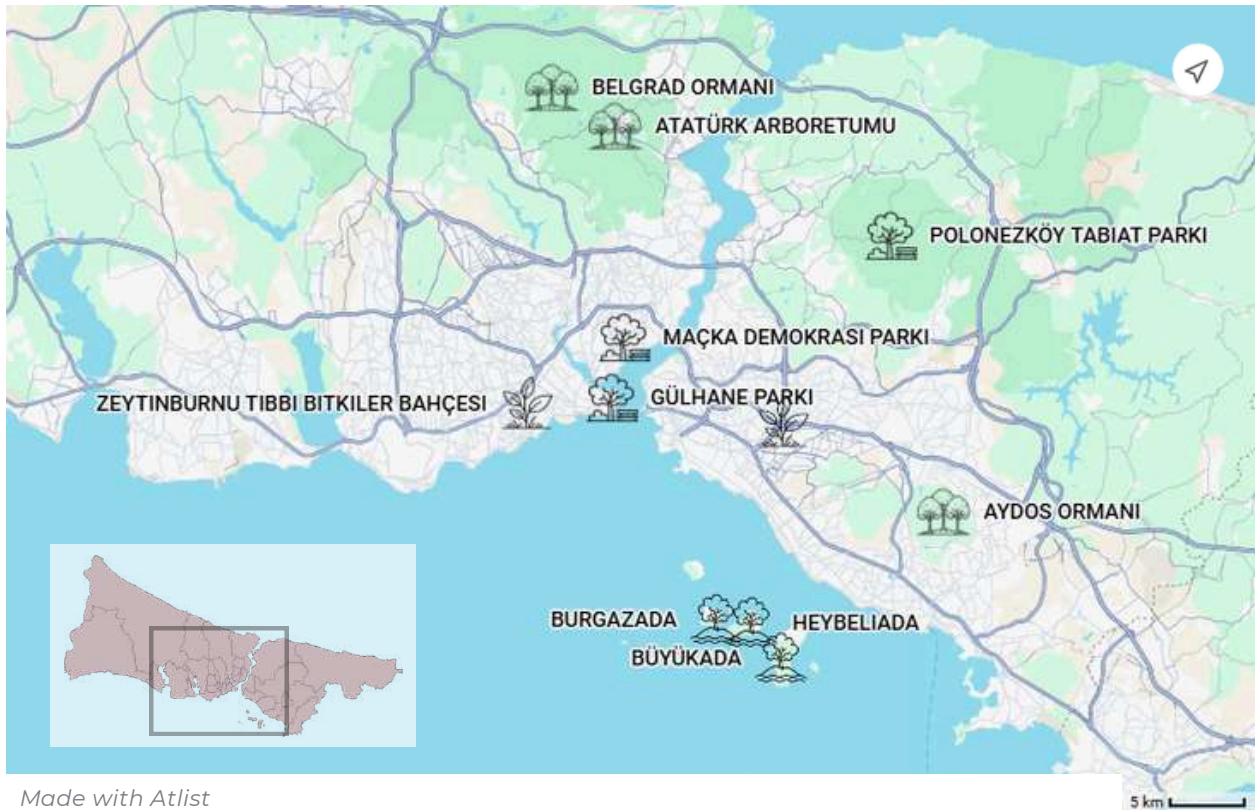


Photo source: Kalpazankaya Restaurant

NATURE ESCAPES AROUND İSTANBUL

Discover a different side of İstanbul beyond its neighborhoods through carefully selected self-guided walks, ranging from clearly signposted trails to more flexible, less marked routes. Easily accessible from the city, these experiences span peaceful forests and green urban parks, with optional guided walks available through Hike'n Sail. To get in touch with their experienced tour guides, please click [here](#).

For an overview of the locations featured in this self-guided nature walks section, please see the map below and click for more details.



WARNING: Recommended places may not be safe at all times, especially not for small groups traveling alone or looking like party tourists. Be aware of your vulnerability and of your surroundings, stay on marked paths, and only visit places at daytime and with other visitors around. If you feel vulnerable or have limited hiking experience, consider visiting with a local guide. This is especially recommended for Aydos Ormanı (Aydos Forest).

**THE İSTANBUL
EXPERIENCE GUIDE**

www.goodtravel.guide





NATURE ESCAPES AROUND İSTANBUL

MOSTLY SIGNPOSTED

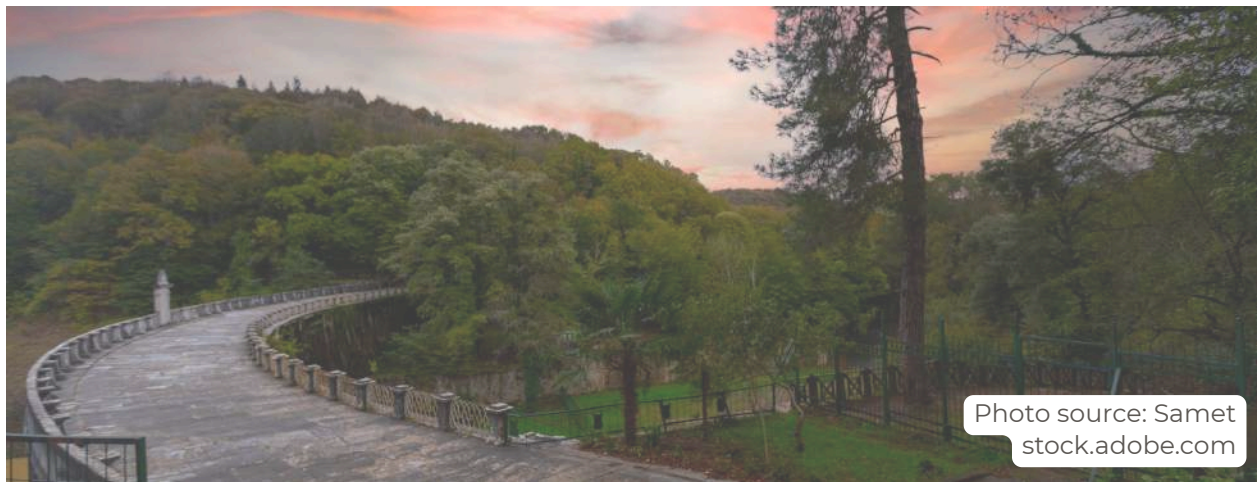


POLONEZKÖY TABİAT PARKI (POLONEZKÖY NATURE PARK)

This circular walk in Polonezköy features clear, well-marked paths through a peaceful natural setting. It starts and ends at the Czestochowa Church (from 1914) and is accessible via public transport from Üsküdar via Beykoz.





-  **Starting point:** Czestochowa Church
-  **Duration:** 2 h
-  **Distance:** 7 km
-  **Level:** Easy

Click [here](#) for more information.



BELGRAD ORMANI (BELGRAD FOREST)

Belgrad Ormanı offers a variety of well-marked, clearly maintained trails in a lush, peaceful setting. Ideal for walking or running, it features shaded paths and scenic surroundings enjoyable year-round. It is best accessed by car, around 30 km from Galata Bridge.

-  **Starting point:** Neşet Suyu (Bahçeköy, Belgrad Ormanı)
-  **Duration:** 1 h
-  **Distance:** 6,2 km
-  **Level:** Easy

Click [here](#) for more information.

NATURE ESCAPES AROUND İSTANBUL

MOSTLY SIGNPOSTED



MAÇKA DEMOKRASİ PARKI (MAÇKA DEMOCRACY PARK)

Maçka Demokrasi Parkı offers a relaxed nature escape in the heart of the city, within walking distance of Taksim, Nişantaşı, and Harbiye, and easily accessible by metro. With gentle, well-maintained paths, it is ideal for an easy stroll.

 **Starting point:** Maçka Parkı entrance

 **Duration:** 1-2 h

 **Distance:** 2-3 km

 **Level:** Easy

Click [here](#) for more information.



GÜLHANE PARKI (GÜLHANE PARK)

Gülhane Parkı offers a peaceful retreat in the historic heart of İstanbul, easily accessible via the T1 tram (Gülhane stop). With shaded, well-maintained paths, gardens, and Bosphorus views, it is ideal for a gentle and scenic walk.

 **Starting point:** Gülhane Parkı main entrance

 **Duration:** 1-2 h

 **Distance:** 1-2 km

 **Level:** Easy

Click [here](#) for more information.

NATURE ESCAPES AROUND İSTANBUL

MOSTLY NOT SIGNPOSTED



AYDOS ORMANI FROM AYDOS GÖLETİ

Aydos Ormanı (Aydos Forest) offers a natural escape, with a lake, forest landscapes and viewpoints. It includes two main routes and is easily accessible from Kadıköy via metro to Kartal, followed by a short minibus ride. A fair level of hiking experience and planning is recommended to navigate these routes independently, as trails in the forest are not well marked and can be difficult to follow. A similar experience is also offered as a guided winter activity by Hike'n Sail ([Snowdrop Hike](#)).

NOTE: The Aydos Ormanı, where these routes take place starting from Aydos Göleti (Aydos Pond), should not be confused with Aydos Millet Bahçesi, a public park on the opposite side of Aydos Hill with clearly defined paths and leisure areas.

Starting point: Aydos Göleti (Aydos Pond)

Aydos Ormanı (Forest)

Duration: 3 h

Distance: 7,8 km

Level: Moderate

Aydos Kalesi (Castle)

Duration: 2,5 h

Distance: 8,2 km

Level: Easy

Click on each route name for more information.



NEZAHAT GÖKYIĞİT BOTANİK BAHÇESİ (NEZAHAT GOKYIGIT BOTANICAL GARDEN)

Built on reclaimed land at a busy highway junction, this oasis in the concrete showcases endemic Turkish flora and the unique Calamity Garden, telling a powerful story of biodiversity, recovery, and resilience in the heart of the city.

Starting point: Main entrance (near the highway junction in Ataşehir)

Duration: 1-2 h

Distance: 2-4 km

Level: Easy

Click [here](#) for more information.

NATURE ESCAPES AROUND İSTANBUL

MOSTLY NOT SIGNPOSTED



Photo source: Sinandogan
stock.adobe.com

ATATÜRK ARBORETUMU (ATATÜRK ARBORETUM)

It offers a scenic, tranquil escape by bus to Bahçeköy, functioning as a living museum with strict no picnic and no noise rules, exemplifying high value responsible tourism, and featuring over 2000 labeled plant taxa and rare woody species for exploration.

Starting point: Bahçeköy bus station (Atatürk Ağaç Parkı)

Duration: 2,5 h

Distance: 8,1 km

Level: Easy

Click [here](#) for more information.



Photo source: Bediha Duru Öksüz
stock.adobe.com

ZEYTİNBURNU TIBBİ BİTKİLER BAHÇESİ (ZEYTİNBURNU MEDICINAL PLANT GARDEN)

This specialized sensory garden focuses on ethnobotany, showcasing Turkey's rich herbal traditions and cultural uses of plants. Through immersive displays and hands-on natural remedy workshops, it offers an engaging experience that connects visitors with nature and traditional knowledge.

Starting point: Main entrance in Zeytinburnu (Bus stop near Yeniçiftlik Yolu / Merkezefendi)

Duration: 1-2 h

Distance: 1-2 km

Level: Easy

Click [here](#) for more information.

THE PRINCES' ISLANDS (ADALAR)

The Princes' Islands offer a variety of flexible walking options across Burgazada, Büyükada, and Heybeliada, ranging from short scenic strolls to longer easy routes. These routes are also part of carefully selected Good Travel Experiences featured in this guide, including curated options developed by Hike'n Sail. Click [here](#) to find out more.

WHAT IS ON IN İSTANBUL

Throughout the year, İstanbul's cultural calendar offers a dynamic mix of seasonal events, local traditions, and city-wide celebrations. From large-scale festivals to spontaneous neighborhood gatherings, these moments provide a unique opportunity to experience the city beyond its landmarks and connect with local life.



April – İstanbul Tulip Festival

Each spring, parks across the city, including Emirgan Park, Gülhane Park, and Sultanahmet Square, fill with millions of tulips in bloom. This long-standing tradition transforms public spaces into vibrant landscapes of color and is one of the most visually striking times to visit.

May – Hidirellez Festival

Marking the arrival of warmer days, Hidirellez is marked by joyful gatherings, music, and outdoor festivities. In areas such as Yenikapı and neighborhood parks, visitors may come across informal local celebrations, offering a more spontaneous and authentic cultural experience.

November – İstanbul Marathon

Held annually, the İstanbul Marathon is the only marathon in the world that crosses two continents. The event brings together professional runners and locals alike, with routes spanning from the Asian to the European side of the city.

Explore More Events

For a broader overview of events and festivals in İstanbul, please click [here](#).

RESTORED HERITAGE CULTURAL VENUES (İBB MİRAS)

Bringing İstanbul's Heritage Back to Life

Over the past five years, İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB), through its heritage initiative İBB Miras, has restored 25 historic and iconic sites across the city. These projects carefully preserve the architectural and cultural value of each site while reactivating them as accessible public spaces.

Today, these restored venues serve as vibrant cultural hubs, hosting exhibitions, concerts, and events that are both high-quality and affordable. By transforming historic buildings into active spaces, İBB Miras reconnects residents and visitors with İstanbul's rich heritage in a meaningful and contemporary way.

Why it matters?

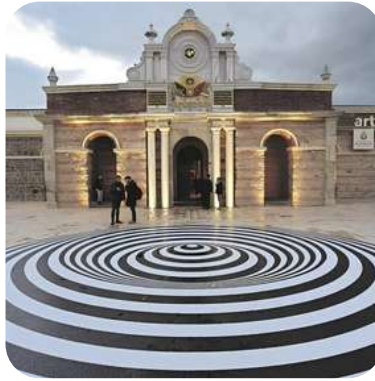
- Preserves and revitalizes historic buildings
- Makes cultural heritage accessible to all
- Encourages local engagement with heritage spaces
- Supports the responsible use of cultural assets

Examples of Restored Venues



Müze Gazhane

Former Ottoman gasworks →
now a major cultural complex



Artistanbul Feshane

Former Ottoman textile factory →
now a large cultural venue



Cendere Sanat

Former water pumping station →
now a contemporary art space

As you explore the city, keep an eye out for İBB Miras sites along your route. Visiting these spaces offers a unique opportunity to experience how İstanbul's past is being preserved and reimagined for today. For more information, please click [here](#) (only available in Turkish).

GOOD TRAVEL EXPERIENCES (GTEs)

The experiences featured in the following pages are verified by experts and assessed through a structured framework. Each one contributes to supporting local communities, preserving cultural heritage, or reducing environmental impact. All GTEs are part of a human-led verification process and can be identified by the logo below. For the location of all Good Travel Experiences, see the web version in <https://goodtravel.guide/istanbul>

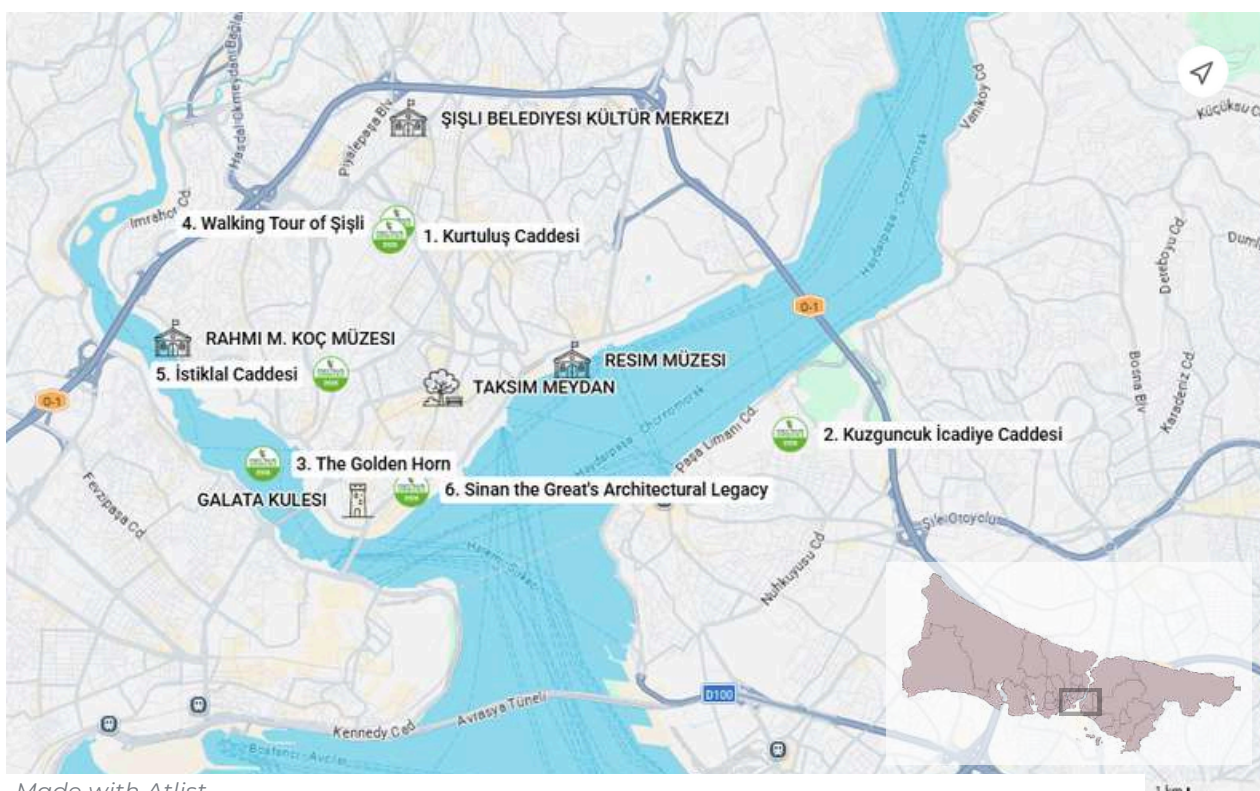


CITY WALKS: LIVING STREETS

Led by local guides, these city walks offer deeper context and storytelling, revealing layers of culture, architecture, and community that might otherwise go unnoticed. Here, discovery unfolds step by step through:

- **Multicultural neighborhoods:** Streets shaped by centuries of coexistence, reflecting the city's diverse urban fabric.
- **Urban life:** Everyday rhythms beyond iconic landmarks, from local neighborhoods to Golden Horn waterfronts.
- **Architecture and urban memory:** From Belle Époque apartments to Ottoman houses, discover historic buildings and streets that reveal how the city continues to evolve.

Slow down and experience the city through observation, conversation, and the simple act of walking.



Click on the map above to explore each experience in more detail. Look for the logo to identify Good Travel Experiences. For the location of all Good Travel Experiences, see the web version in <https://goodtravel.guide/istanbul>



1. KURTULUŞ CADDESİ (STREET)

MULTICULTURAL HERITAGE & EVERYDAY LIFE

Some streets (*caddesi* in Turkish) tell the story of a city better than any monument. Kurtuluş Caddesi is one of them. Lined with historic bakeries, delicatessens, cafés, and neighborhood shops, this lively street reflects the multicultural heritage that has shaped the area for generations. Greek, Armenian, Jewish, and Turkish communities have all left their mark here, creating a place where traditions continue through food, conversation, and everyday routines. This guided walk invites visitors to experience Istanbul through its living street culture, where aromas from bakeries, the rhythm of local businesses, and stories shared along the way bring the neighborhood to life.



WHY IT MATTERS

Neighborhood streets like Kurtuluş preserve everyday culture often hidden behind major landmarks. Visiting family-run bakeries, delicatessens, and small shops supports long-standing local businesses and food traditions. As the tour is fully walkable, it offers a slower way to explore the city while helping reduce the carbon footprint.

Duration: 5 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Urban walk,
Cultural exploration

Start/end point: Osmanbey
Metro Station

Difficulty Level: Easy

Not accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for travelers who enjoy urban walks beyond the tourist crowds



GTE SCAN: 82%



★ Supports small businesses & lower-emission travel



CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



2. KUZGUNCUK İCADIYE CADDESİ (STREET)

A LIVING STREET OF COLOR, CULTURE & LOCAL LIFE

The journey begins with a ferry crossing the Bosphorus, one of the most scenic ways to experience İstanbul as the skyline slowly gives way to quieter neighborhoods on the Asian side. Arriving in Kuzguncuk, the pace immediately shifts. Along İcadiye Caddesi, colorful wooden houses, independent cafés, bookstores, and neighborhood bakeries create a street that feels more like a small village than a metropolis. For centuries, Greek, Armenian, Jewish, and Turkish communities lived side by side here, leaving behind churches, synagogues, and mosques within walking distance.

WHY IT MATTERS

Reaching Kuzguncuk by ferry highlights one of the best ways to move through İstanbul. Used daily by residents, ferries connect neighborhoods across the Bosphorus while easing traffic. Exploring Kuzguncuk on foot afterward lets visitors experience the area at a slower pace while supporting independent cafés and small shops that sustain local life.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Urban walk, Cultural exploration

Start/end point: Kabataş Ferry Terminal

Difficulty Level: Easy

Not accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for travelers seeking quiet neighborhoods away from tourist crowds.

GTE SCAN: 82%



★ Supports small businesses & lower-emission travel



Bosphorus Neighborhoods

Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

3. THE GOLDEN HORN

MOSAICS, MARKETS & MANY FAITHS

Few places reveal İstanbul's layered history as vividly as the Golden Horn. Curving deep into the city, this historic inlet has been a harbor, meeting point, and lifeline for centuries. Walking along its shores, the journey moves through neighborhoods shaped by Byzantine and Ottoman heritage, where churches, mosques, synagogues, and historic streets stand side by side. Along the way, visitors step inside some of the area's most important cultural landmarks while discovering quieter corners of İstanbul often missed by travelers. As you move along the Golden Horn, each stop offers a new perspective on the city.



WHY IT MATTERS

The Golden Horn has long been a meeting point of cultures and faiths that shaped İstanbul's identity. Exploring its historic neighborhoods on foot and by public transport offers a slower way to discover the city. Supporting small cafés and local businesses helps sustain neighborhood life, while visiting places of worship respectfully honors traditions that keep this heritage alive.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Urban walk, Cultural exploration

Start/end point: Eminönü – Eyüp T5

Difficulty Level: Easy

Not accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for travelers interested in history and religion.



GTE SCAN: 88%



★ Supports living heritage & lower-emission travel



Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

4. WALKING TOUR OF ŞİŞLİ

DISCOVERING AN AWARD-WINNING GREEN DESTINATIONS DISTRICT

In the streets of Şişli, İstanbul's layered identity unfolds block by block. Elegant early-20th-century apartment buildings stand beside churches, parks, and lively cafés, reflecting the district's long tradition of cultural diversity. Walking through the neighborhood reveals a mix of histories: from the house where Mustafa Kemal Atatürk once lived to historic religious landmarks and public spaces where local life continues to thrive. Along the route, architecture, community life, and urban nature come together to tell the story of a district that has embraced both its heritage and its future, becoming Türkiye's first municipality recognized by Green Destinations.



WHY IT MATTERS

Şişli's Green Destinations award recognizes the district's commitment to cultural diversity and responsible development. Exploring the neighborhood on foot allows visitors to experience historic landmarks, parks, and everyday street life while discovering how cities can protect heritage, support local communities, and shape better ways of experiencing urban destinations.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Urban walk, Cultural exploration

Start/end point: Cevahir AVM / Taksim Square

Difficulty Level: Easy

Not accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for responsible urban explorers.

GTE SCAN: 88%



★ Supports urban planning & cultural diversity



Contemporary İstanbul

Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

5. İSTİKLAL CADDESİ (STREET)

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE APARTMENTS OF İSTANBUL'S BELLE ÉPOQUE

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the hills of Pera and Galata were becoming one of the most cosmopolitan corners of İstanbul. Elegant apartment buildings appeared along newly planned streets, reflecting a period when the city was opening to new ideas, architecture, and lifestyles. This walk follows the traces of that era through historic façades, hidden courtyards, and grand staircases that still define the neighborhood today. Each building reveals a fragment of everyday life during İstanbul's Belle Époque, when artists, merchants, and diplomats lived side by side in a district shaped by cultural exchange and architectural ambition.



WHY IT MATTERS

Historic Belle Époque apartments are an important part of İstanbul's architectural heritage. Exploring these buildings on foot encourages appreciation for historic urban landscapes while supporting the preservation of residential architecture that continues to shape the character of Beyoğlu's streets and neighborhoods.

Duration: 5 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Urban walk, Architecture

Start/end point: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi / Tünel (Historic funicular).

Difficulty Level: Easy

Partially accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for travelers interested in architecture and photography.

GTE SCAN: 81%



★ Supports historic building preservation & heritage conservation



Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

6. SINAN THE GREAT'S ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY

OTTOMAN ARCHITECTURE BEYOND MAIN ROUTES

To understand Istanbul, one must look up. Across the city, the work of Mimar Sinan defines the skyline: domes, courtyards, and mosques that still shape its identity today. This experience follows his legacy through a series of key sites, revealing how architecture structured both daily life and urban space in the Ottoman world. Moving between these places, visitors discover light-filled interiors, balanced proportions, and complexes designed to serve entire communities. More than monuments, these spaces reveal a vision of the city where design, function, and social life were deeply intertwined.



WHY IT MATTERS

Sinan's architecture reflects an integrated approach to urban life, combining cultural, social, and functional spaces. Visiting these sites supports their preservation while encouraging a deeper understanding of heritage. Exploring them across the city using public transport also contributes to a more balanced distribution of tourism.

Duration: 8 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Urban walk, Architecture

Start/end point: Tophane Fountain

Difficulty Level: Easy

Not accessible for wheelchair users

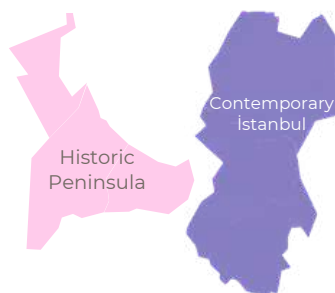
Ideal for travelers interested in architecture and photography.



GTE SCAN: 82%



★ Supports historic building preservation & heritage conservation



Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



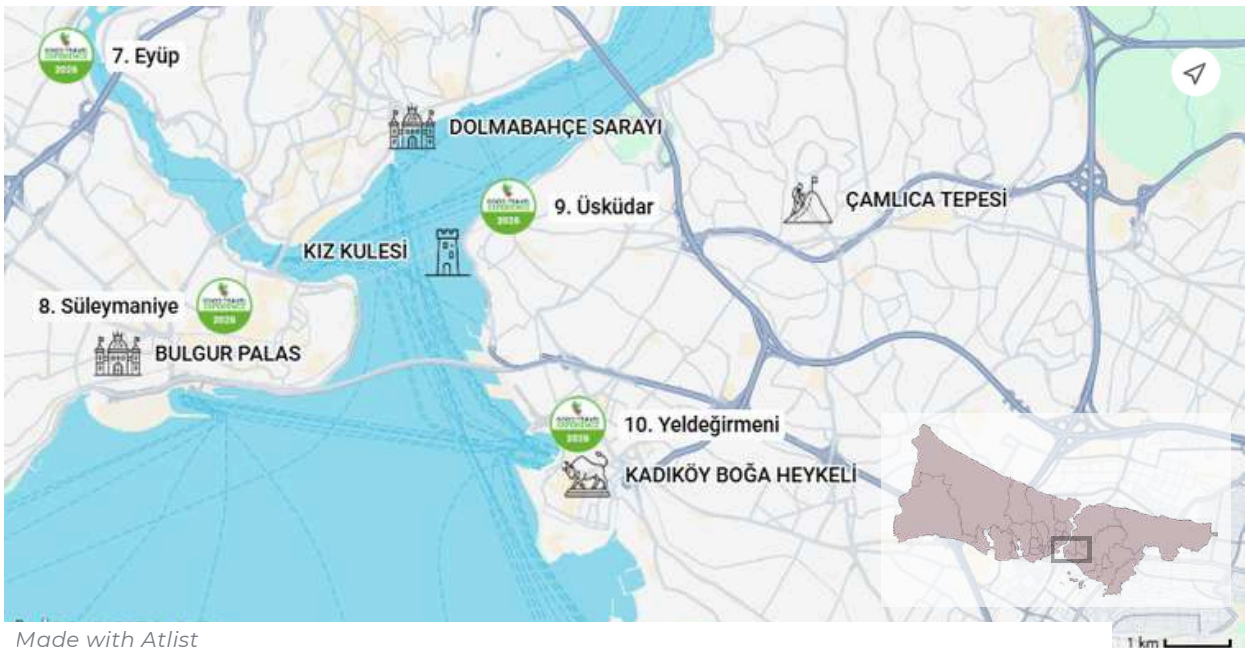
HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

AUTHENTIC NEIGHBORHOODS

Crafted for the traveler who understands that true luxury lies in the authentic. The Authentic Neighborhood Series **leaves the tourist trail behind to immerse you in the real city** — where the ferries dictate the rhythm of the day and tradition breathes life into every corner. Here, luxury is the privilege of living at a different pace. The experience unfolds through:

- **Rooted flavors:** Follow the scent of freshly roasted beans, savor century-old recipes in a local *esnaf lokantası*, and taste the seasonal delicacies that only true İstanbulites know.
- **Unpretentious wellbeing:** Pause time in a neighborhood hammam, indulging in a ritual that remains an intimate pillar of daily culture.
- **The art of the bespoke:** From conversing with a tailor in their modest ateliers, to browsing independent bookshops where quality and human connection matter far more than window dressing.

By walking these lesser-trodden streets, you not only discover the purest essence of İstanbul, but you also help sustain the families and artisans who keep its vibrant soul alive.



Made with Atlist



Click on the map above to explore each experience in more detail. Look for the logo to identify Good Travel Experiences. For the location of all Good Travel Experiences, see the web version in <https://goodtravel.guide/istanbul>



7. EYÜP

PILGRIMS, PIGEONS & PERFECT TEA

As the Golden Horn narrows and the city quiets, Eyüp emerges as a place shaped by centuries of faith and reflection. This historic district has long drawn pilgrims and locals alike, its streets carrying the rhythms of everyday life alongside deep spiritual tradition. The experience begins at the Eyüp Sultan Mosque, one of İstanbul's most revered sites, before continuing through the hillside cemetery, where intricately carved Ottoman gravestones tell stories of the past. As the path climbs, views open across the Golden Horn, revealing a neighborhood where memory, belief, and daily life remain closely intertwined.



WHY IT MATTERS

Eyüp remains one of İstanbul's most important living spiritual districts, where faith and daily life exist side by side. Exploring the area on foot and by public transport offers a slower approach, while small-group visits and mindful behavior help preserve its atmosphere. Supporting local cafés, artisans, and neighborhood businesses helps sustain this community and its traditions.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Urban walk, Cultural exploration

Start/end point: T5 Eminönü-Alibeyköy Tram Station

Difficulty Level: Easy

Not accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for culturally curious, history-minded, and spiritually reflective travelers.



GTE SCAN: 82%



★ Supports living heritage & lower-emission travel



Historic Peninsula

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CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

8. SÜLEYMANIYE

DOMES, COURTYARDS & IMPERIAL GRANDEUR

As the streets lead uphill toward Süleymaniye, the pace of İstanbul softens. Narrow lanes unfold between wooden houses, small workshops, and local cafés where daily life still follows a quieter rhythm. At the heart of the neighborhood stands the Süleymaniye Mosque, Mimar Sinan's masterpiece, surrounded by a historic complex of courtyards, schools, kitchens, and baths once designed to serve the community. Walking through these spaces and along hidden backstreets, with views opening over the Golden Horn, the experience reveals a district where history is not only preserved, but still lived.



WHY IT MATTERS

Süleymaniye preserves a historic urban landscape where architecture and daily life remain closely connected. Exploring its streets on foot supports small workshops, local eateries, and neighborhood cafés while offering a slower way of experiencing the city and helping sustain the character of one of İstanbul's most authentic districts.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Urban walk,
Cultural exploration

Start/end point: İstanbul
University

Difficulty Level: Easy

Not accessible for wheelchair users

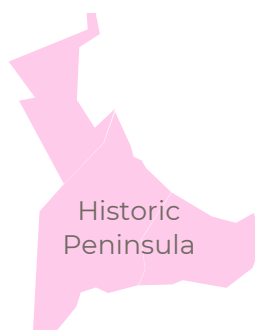
Ideal for travelers seeking historic neighborhoods, quiet streets, and local life.



GTE SCAN: 89%



★ Supports small businesses & lower-emission travel



CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

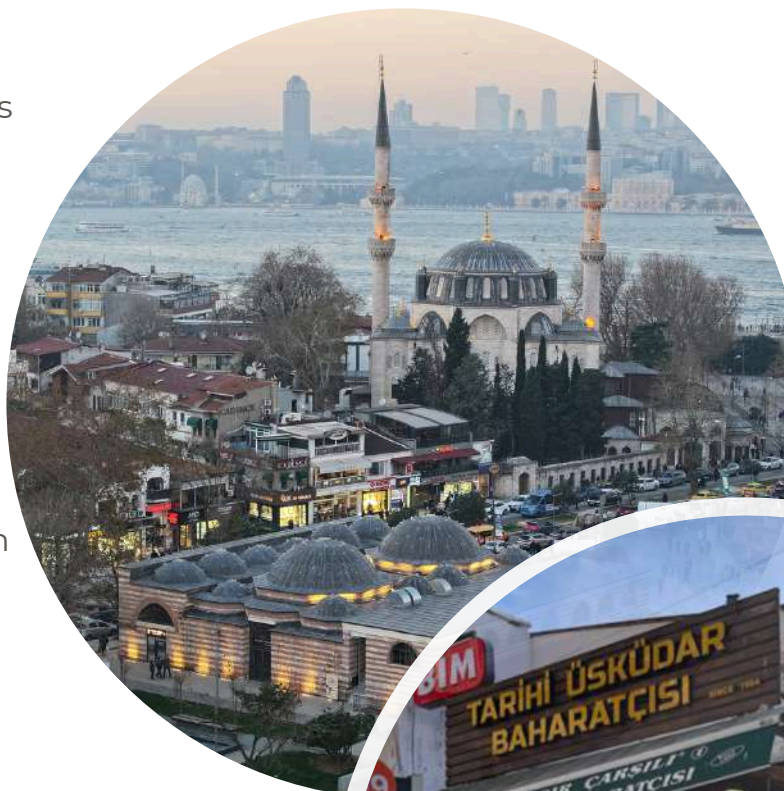
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9. ÜSKÜDAR

FERRIES, FAITH & FANTASTIC FOOD

The day begins with a ferry crossing to Üsküdar, where the rhythm of the city shifts on arrival. Along the waterfront, mosques face the Bosphorus, while nearby streets lead into lively neighborhood markets filled with olives, cheeses, spices, and freshly baked simit. The walk moves between historic landmarks like Mihrimah Sultan Mosque and everyday spaces where locals shop, eat, and gather. Stops along the way introduce traditional pastries and small culinary treats, offering a taste of the district's food culture. In Üsküdar, history is present, but it is through markets and flavors that the neighborhood truly comes alive.



WHY IT MATTERS

Üsküdar's markets and small food businesses are central to its identity. Engaging with local vendors, bakeries, and traditional eateries supports neighborhood economies and preserves everyday food culture. Combined with travel by ferry and walking, the experience promotes a more local, positive way of discovering Istanbul beyond its main tourist areas.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Urban walk,
Cultural exploration,
Gastronomy

Start/end point: Kabataş Ferry Terminal

Difficulty Level: Easy

Not accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for food lovers and culturally curious travelers.



GTE SCAN: 82%



★ Supports small businesses & local food culture



CULTURE & GASTRONOMY EXPERIENCE

Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



10. YELDEĞİRMENİ

CREATIVE HERITAGE & WATERFRONT LIFE

In Yeldeğirmeni, the walls speak before the streets do. Large-scale murals stretch across buildings, turning the neighborhood into an open-air gallery shaped by artists from around the world. Between them, early Art Nouveau apartment façades recall a different chapter of the city, when this was one of Istanbul's first modern residential districts. Walking these streets reveals a neighborhood in transition, where old structures, creative studios, and everyday life intersect. Along the way, a visit to a traditional coffee hardware shop offers a hands-on moment of roasting and grinding beans, ending with a freshly brewed cup that grounds the experience in local ritual.



WHY IT MATTERS

Yeldeğirmeni shows how neighborhoods can evolve without losing their identity. Street art and creative spaces have revitalized the area while preserving its architectural heritage and community life. Reaching the neighborhood by ferry and exploring it on foot supports local studios, cafés, and small businesses, while offering a more community focused way to experience the city.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Urban walk,
Cultural exploration

Start/end point: Karaköy Ferry Terminal

Difficulty Level: Easy

Not accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for those drawn to street art, independent culture, and creative neighborhoods.



GTE SCAN: 88%



★ Supports small businesses & cultural diversity



Kadıköy and the Asian Side

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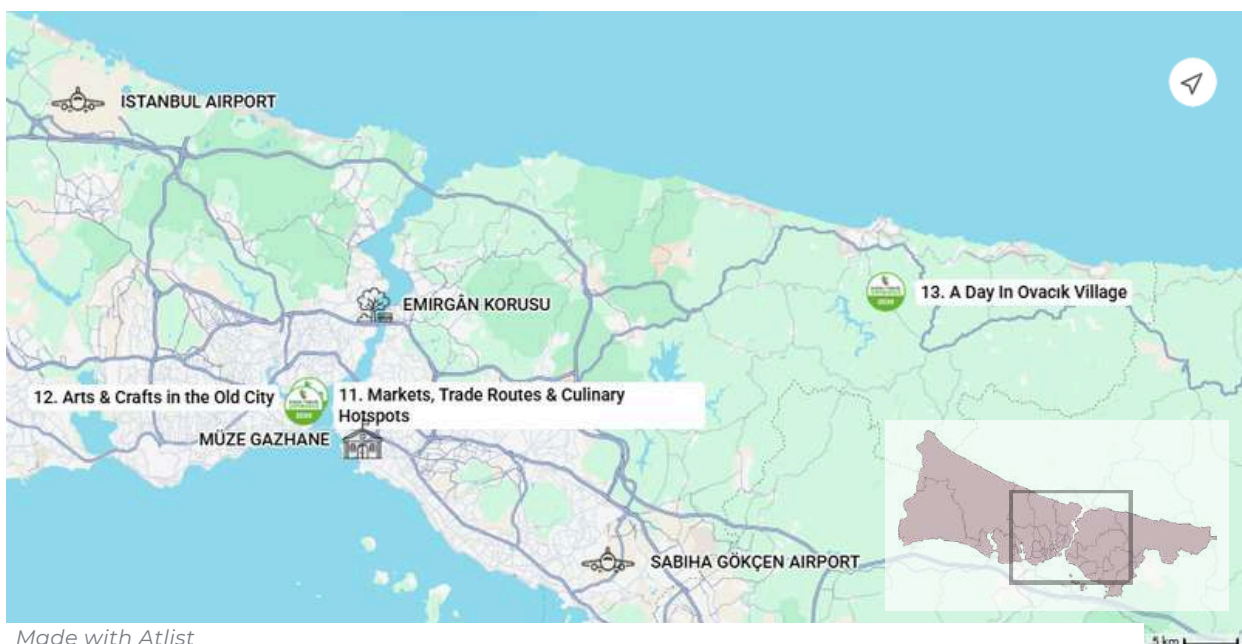
CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE & CULTURAL IMMERSION

For travelers who wish to connect more deeply with the people and traditions that shape İstanbul, these experiences offer **meaningful encounters beyond conventional sightseeing**. Guided by local hosts, artisans, and cultural interpreters, visitors gain insight into everyday spaces where heritage, community, and creativity thrive. Here, discovery happens through human connection. The experience unfolds through:

- **Living traditions:** Explore historic markets, artisan workshops, and cultural institutions where long-standing crafts, culinary traditions, and trade networks continue to shape İstanbul's identity.
- **Heritage and storytelling:** Through guided interpretation, visitors gain deeper understanding of the architecture, history, and cultural influences that define the city's layered urban landscape.
- **Community connection:** Meet local producers, artisans, and residents who share their knowledge, skills, and way of life.

By engaging respectfully and supporting small local businesses, travelers help sustain the cultural practices that keep İstanbul's heritage alive.



Made with Atlist



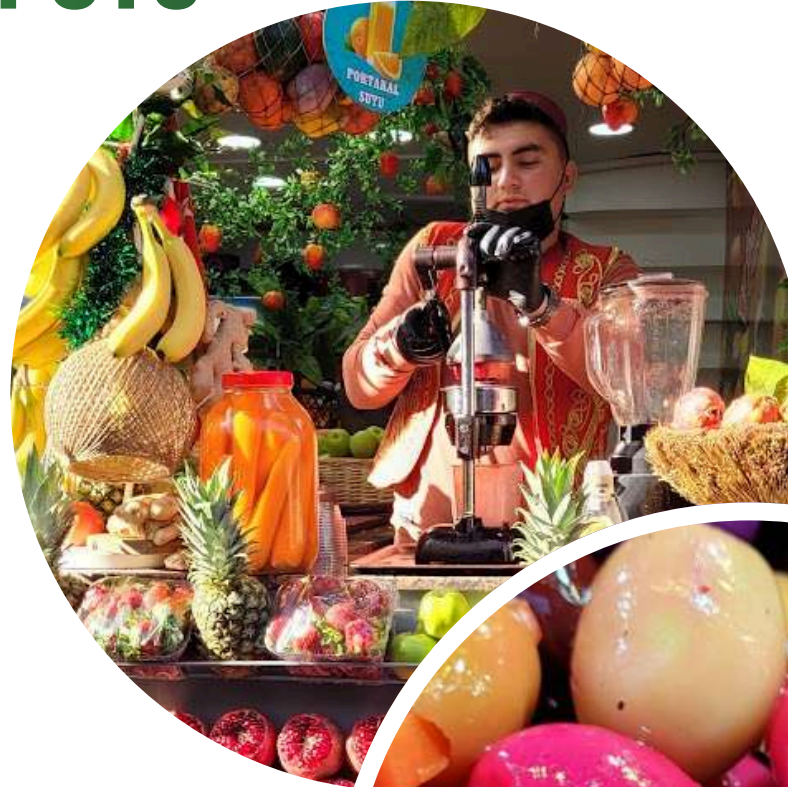
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11. MARKETS, TRADE ROUTES & CULINARY HOTSPOTS

FLAVORS OF TWO CONTINENTS

In Istanbul, food is not just something you eat; it is how the city is experienced. This walk moves through local streets, markets, and small eateries, where flavors tell stories of trade, migration, and everyday life. From street food stalls to long-standing family-run spots, each stop reveals a different layer of the city's culinary identity. Along the way, visitors taste traditional dishes, discover lesser-known specialties, and step into places where locals gather. More than a food tour, it is a journey through neighborhoods where culture, history, and daily life are best understood around the table.



WHY IT MATTERS

Food experiences connect visitors directly with local culture and community. Choosing small eateries, markets, and family-run businesses supports local economies and helps preserve culinary traditions. Exploring by ferry and on foot also encourages a slower way of experiencing the city through its everyday food culture.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Urban walk,
Cultural exploration,
Gastronomy

Start/end point: Karaköy Ferry Terminal

Difficulty Level: Easy

Not accessible for wheelchair users

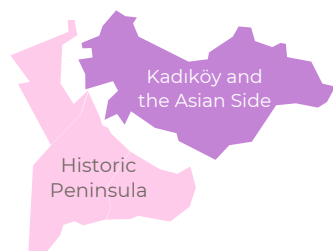
Includes tastings of at least eight local specialties.



GTE SCAN: 78%



★ Supports small businesses & local food culture



CULTURE & GASTRONOMY EXPERIENCE

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12. ARTS & CRAFTS IN THE OLD CITY

AUTHENTIC SHOPPING AND ARTISAN TRADITIONS

Wandering through Istanbul's historic quarters, the experience unfolds like a dialogue between past and present. Guided through artisan districts and hidden workshops, visitors encounter craftspeople shaping ceramics, textiles, and intricate designs rooted in centuries-old traditions. The route weaves through vibrant markets and quieter ateliers, where each object tells a story of skill and heritage. Stops include renowned bazaars and lesser-known cultural hubs, offering insight into authentic production rather than mass tourism. It's not about buying souvenirs, but understanding their origin, and connecting with the city's creative culture.



WHY IT MATTERS

This experience supports local economies by prioritizing independent artisans and fair trade practices. It helps preserve traditional crafts while encouraging mindful consumption. It favors small-scale production over mass goods. It also fosters meaningful exchanges between visitors and local communities, promoting cultural appreciation and continuity.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Shopping tour, Cultural exploration

Start/end point: German Fountain

Difficulty Level: Easy

Partially accessible for wheelchair users

Visitors have free time to browse ceramics, jewelry, rugs, etc, with recommendations from the tour guide.



GTE SCAN: 88%



★ Supports artisan workshops & creative communities



Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

13. A DAY IN OVACIK VILLAGE

A TASTE OF VILLAGE LIFE

Leaving Istanbul behind, the experience unfolds in the quiet countryside near the Black Sea, where the village of Ovacik offers a warm and unhurried welcome. The day begins around a shared breakfast table, filled with fresh bread, homemade cheeses, and seasonal produce. Afterwards, a calm 4km walk leads through oak forests and open fields, far from the city's pace. Back in the village, time is spent in kitchens and gardens, preparing traditional foods and learning age-old techniques. With no fixed schedule, the day adapts to the season, shaped by local rhythms, simple pleasures, and genuine hospitality that makes visitors feel truly at home.



WHY IT MATTERS

This experience contributes to rural communities by supporting local households directly. It helps maintain traditional knowledge and ways of life that are increasingly at risk. It values existing resources and community practices. It also encourages respectful cultural exchange, strengthening understanding between visitors and residents while reinforcing local identity and pride.

Duration: 10 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Rural, Community-based

Start/end point: Karaköy Ferry Terminal

Difficulty Level: Easy

Partially accessible for wheelchair users

The village remains untouched by mass tourism. Learn more about the Ovacik association [here](#).

GTE SCAN: 89%



★ Supports rural livelihoods & living heritage



NATURE & CULTURE EXPERIENCE

Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



NATURE AND CULTURE HIKES: ACTIVE OUTDOORS

The **Princes' Islands Walking Routes** invite you to explore at a slower pace, uncovering a unique blend of history, landscapes, and everyday life. Winding through shaded streets and scenic trails, they reveal a setting that has long inspired creative minds. Developed with local stakeholders, the initiative promotes a mindful way of experiencing the islands while supporting their long-term preservation.

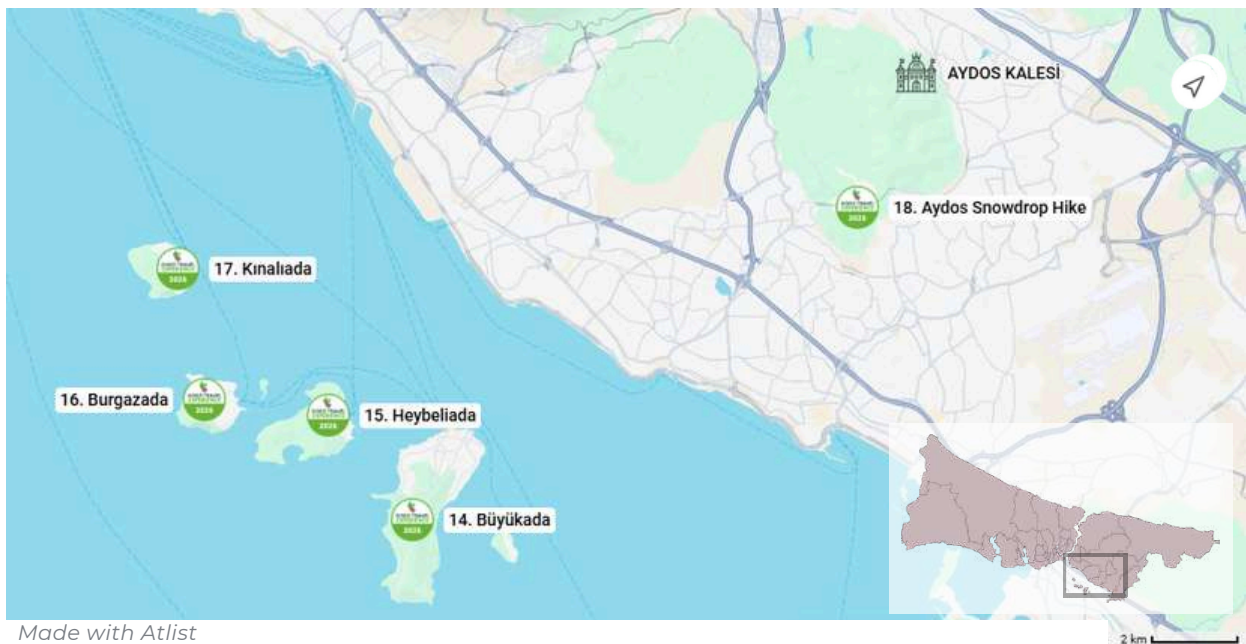
Our Commitment to Responsible Tourism

We ask visitors to help minimize their impact on the islands' fragile ecosystems and tranquil way of life.

How Visitors Can Help Us Protect the Islands

To ensure tourism remains balanced and natural areas are safeguarded, we kindly ask visitors to:

- Avoid harming trees, flowers, wildlife, and natural habitats.
- Respect the quiet character of the islands.
- Reduce waste and use recycling stations whenever possible.
- Be considerate toward local residents and fellow visitors.



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14. BÜYÜKADA

ISLAND OF PINES & MONASTERIES

Leaving the city behind, the journey begins with a ferry ride to Büyükada, the largest of the Prince Islands, where quiet roads and pine-covered hills replace İstanbul's intensity. The hike unfolds over scenic trails, passing historic mansions, monasteries, and viewpoints overlooking the sea. Along the way, stories of past residents, from exiled figures to Ottoman elites, bring the landscape to life. The route climbs towards Aya Yorgi Hill, with pauses to take in the surroundings before descending through shaded paths and visiting the island museum. What makes it special is this blend of nature, history, and a rare car-free environment.



WHY IT MATTERS

The experience encourages lower-emission travel through hiking and ferry transport, while promoting awareness of cultural and natural heritage. By guiding small groups and respecting local life, it helps protect biodiversity, preserve historic sites, and support responsible tourism practices.

Duration: 9-10 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Not available in July and August

Type of activity: Hiking routes

Start/end point: Sirkeci Mavi
Marmara Pier

Difficulty Level: Moderate level of fitness recommended

Not accessible for wheelchair users

The hike covers 10-12 km on varied terrain.



GTE SCAN: 82%



★ Supports nature and heritage conservation & lower-emission travel



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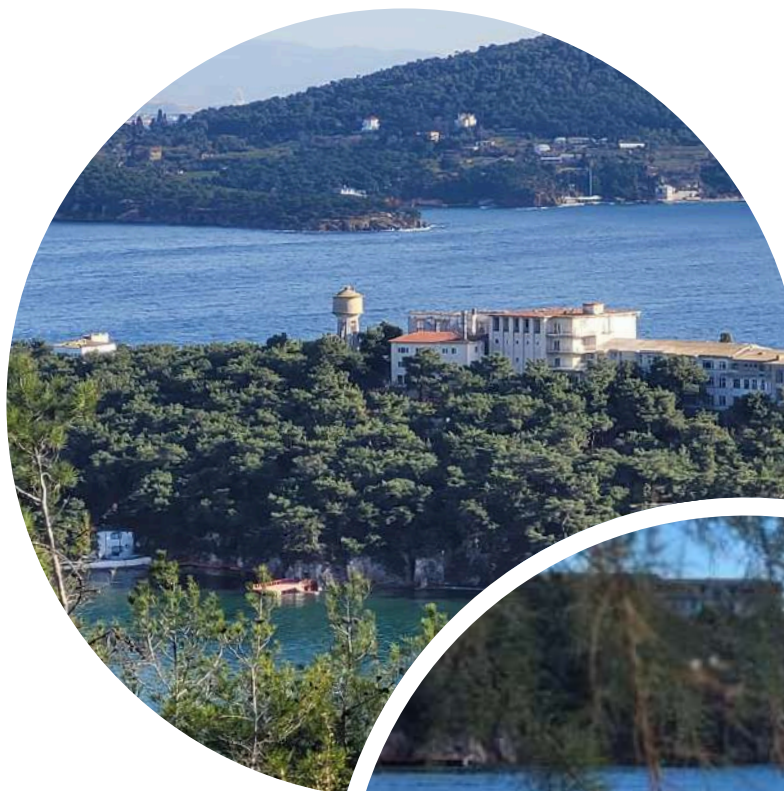


NATURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

15. HEYBELIADA

CHRISTIAN HERITAGE & QUIET COVES

The journey begins with a scenic ferry ride across the Sea of Marmara, as Istanbul's skyline slowly fades into open water and island views. Upon arrival in Heybeliada, there is time for a relaxed coffee or tea before setting out on foot. The walk moves through quiet roads, coastal paths, and pine-covered hills, with shaded trails opening to wide sea views. The island's character unfolds through its Greek Orthodox heritage, maritime traditions, and history as a summer retreat. The experience stands out for its unhurried rhythm, where nature, heritage, and everyday life come together in a calm escape.



WHY IT MATTERS

This experience promotes lower-emission travel by combining walking and ferry transport, reducing reliance on cars and limiting environmental pressure. Small groups and a slower pace help protect the island's character, contributing to more responsible tourism and the preservation of both environment and native life.

Duration: 9-10 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Not available in July and August

Type of activity: Hiking routes

Start/end point: Sirkeci Mavi
Marmara Pier

Difficulty Level: Moderate level of fitness recommended

Not accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for travelers seeking a nature-focused escape.

GTE SCAN: 82%



★ Supports nature and heritage conservation & lower-emission travel



Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



NATURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

16. BURGAZADA

WHERE WRITERS FOUND INSPIRATION AND CALM

Burgazada offers a quieter side of the Prince Islands, where the atmosphere feels more intimate and unhurried. The experience unfolds on foot along coastal paths and gentle hillside routes, passing wooden houses, modest churches, and open sea views. The island is closely linked to writers and intellectuals who once found inspiration in its calm setting, adding a literary layer to the landscape. Its character also reflects minority communities and maritime life. With no cars and little noise, everything moves at a slower pace, creating space to observe, reflect, and connect with a place that shaped stories and was shaped by them.



WHY IT MATTERS

This experience helps preserve the character of smaller island communities while encouraging appreciation of cultural and literary heritage. By keeping groups small and focusing on slower exploration, it helps protect natural spaces. Breaks at independent island businesses support the local economy, promoting community-based tourism practices.

Duration: 9-10 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Not available in July and August

Type of activity: Hiking routes

Start/end point: Kabataş Ferry Terminal

Difficulty Level: Moderate level of fitness recommended

Not accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for travelers seeking a nature-focused escape.

GTE SCAN: 82%



★ Supports nature conservation & living heritage



Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



NATURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

17. KINALIADA

AMONG RED HILLS AND THE BEAUTY OF A SIMPLE LIFE

Kinaliada reveals a different side of the Prince Islands, where the landscape feels more open, exposed, and shaped by its geology. Smaller than the other islands, it has a more local feel, with a welcoming village atmosphere. After a ferry ride, the experience opens with wide views across rocky hills, sparse vegetation, and striking earth tones. As the walk unfolds, the island's history becomes visible through its relationship with limited natural resources, shaping settlement patterns, quarry activity, and community life. The experience stands out for its raw character, defined by adaptation, resilience, and the forces of nature.



WHY IT MATTERS

The experience highlights how communities adapt to limited resources, encouraging awareness and resilience. Set within a delicate island ecosystem, it promotes thoughtful exploration to help preserve Kinaliada's quiet character and natural beauty. Supporting small, locally rooted experiences helps protect both the landscape and the island's social fabric.

Duration: 9-10 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Not available in July and August

Type of activity: Hiking routes

Start/end point: Kabatas Ferry Terminal

Difficulty Level: Moderate level of fitness recommended

Not accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for those interested in landscapes and geology.



GTE SCAN: 82%



★ Supports nature conservation & living heritage



The Princes' Islands

Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



NATURE & CULTURE EXPERIENCE

18. AYDOS SNOWDROP HIKE

A BIODIVERSITY WALK PROTECTING AN ENDEMIC SNOWDROP

Away from central Istanbul, this experience leads into the forested landscape of Aydos Hill, rising to 537 meters above sea level. The walk follows defined trails through woodland, where attention is drawn to the diversity of plant life growing along the route. Guided interpretation highlights endemic species such as the Istanbul snowdrop, alongside other seasonal flora in their natural habitat. The pace encourages observation rather than collection, allowing space to notice small environmental details. The experience finishes with a warm bowl of soup at a local restaurant, a comforting end to a refreshing day outdoors.



WHY IT MATTERS

By following lower-emission routes and maintaining a strictly observational approach, it helps minimize disturbance and raises awareness of the challenges of protecting fragile ecosystems. It highlights the importance of conservation while supporting tourism practices that respect natural habitats and contribute to protecting endemic species.

Duration: 7 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: January & February

Type of activity: Hiking routes

Start/end point: Karaköy Ferry Terminal

Difficulty Level: Moderate level of fitness recommended

Not accessible for wheelchair users

A true winter nature experience just outside Istanbul.



GTE SCAN: 82%



★ Supports nature conservation & environmental awareness



Greater Istanbul

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NATURE EXPERIENCE

HANDS-ON WORKSHOPS

Crafted for the traveler who believes that the most meaningful souvenirs are the ones created by hand, these workshops invite you to **step beyond observation and into the living traditions of İstanbul**, where creativity is guided by patience, skill, and centuries of cultural heritage.

Here, discovery happens through doing. The experiences unfold through:

- **Living craftsmanship:** Work alongside local artisans in ceramics studios, woodcarving ateliers, and mosaic workshops where traditional techniques are shared through small group, hands-on practice.
- **Artistic traditions:** Explore the refined visual culture of Ottoman book arts through ebru (paper marbling), learning how pigments, water, and movement come together in this contemplative artistic practice.
- **Heritage in practice:** Connect with the city's cultural landscapes through workshops and guided explorations that reveal how architecture, materials, and craft traditions continue to shape everyday life in İstanbul.

Each workshop offers a meaningful way to connect with İstanbul's living heritage while supporting the artisans who preserve it.



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Click on the map above to explore each experience in more detail. Look for the logo to identify Good Travel Experiences. For the location of all Good Travel Experiences, see the web version in <https://goodtravel.guide/istanbul>



19. CRAFTS IN ÇUKURCUMA

SHAPE CLAY. MEET THE MAKERS.

Craft is more than technique; it holds memory, identity, and continuity. In this experience, visitors are welcomed into a working studio to explore the quiet art of shaping clay. Guided by local artisans, this hands-on experience invites visitors into İstanbul's living craft culture, where techniques passed down through generations are still practiced today. The journey begins at the monumental Tophane-i Amire, continues through the creative streets of Tophane and Cihangir, and leads to a small studio where clay, conversation, and craftsmanship come together.



WHY IT MATTERS

By focusing on small workshops and direct encounters with local makers, the experience supports independent artisans and helps sustain İstanbul's handmade traditions. Rather than rushing through landmarks, visitors engage with the city at a slower pace, valuing creativity, cultural continuity, and meaningful exchange with the communities that keep these skills alive.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Hands-on, cultural exploration

Start/end point: Tophane Fountain

Difficulty Level: Easy

Not accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for travelers interested in art and creativity.



GTE SCAN: 81%



★ Supports artisan workshops & creative communities



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CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

20. EBRU: PAINTING ON WATER

DROP COLOR. WATCH IT FLOW. MAKE EBRU.

Following the path of Ebru from historic manuscripts to contemporary expression, this experience unfolds between heritage and hands-on creativity. It begins with a guided visit exploring Ottoman book arts, where marbling once enhanced calligraphy and finely bound works. From there, the setting shifts to a local studio, where a master artisan introduces the delicate process of painting on water. Colors drift, expand, and transform before being carefully transferred onto paper. Each step invites focus and curiosity. The experience offers not just a workshop, but a deeper understanding of a living artistic tradition.

WHY IT MATTERS

This experience helps preserve a traditional art form rooted in cultural heritage while supporting local artists and knowledge transmission. It encourages mindful creation using simple materials. It fosters connection through shared creativity and values small artistic practices over mass production, contributing to the preservation of cultural craftsmanship.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Hands-on,
Cultural exploration

Start/end point: Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts

Difficulty Level: Easy

Partially accessible for wheelchair users

Each Ebru piece becomes a one of a kind souvenir of living heritage to take with you.

GTE SCAN: 88%



★ Supports
artisan workshops
& creative
communities



CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

Scan or tap the
QR code.
Discover!
Book your
experience with
Hike'n Sail.



21. GREAT PALACE MOSAICS MUSEUM & MOSAIC WORKSHOP

PIECE BY PIECE: CREATE YOUR OWN MOSAIC

Step into the layered history of Byzantine Istanbul at the Great Palace Mosaics Museum, where remarkably preserved floor mosaics reveal scenes of daily life, animals, and mythological figures once found in imperial settings. With guided interpretation, the artistry and symbolism behind each composition come into focus. The experience then shifts from observation to creation in a hands-on workshop led by a local artisan. Using traditional techniques, participants learn how small tesserae are carefully placed to form patterns and images. What makes it special is this transition from past to present, connecting archaeological heritage with a creative process you can experience firsthand.

WHY IT MATTERS

This experience preserves historical knowledge and traditional craftsmanship by connecting museum heritage with hands-on practice. It supports local artisans while encouraging deeper appreciation of cultural heritage. Through creative work, it promotes engagement, allowing visitors to connect with history in a meaningful way while helping sustain these artistic traditions.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Hands-on, Cultural exploration

Start/end point: [German Fountain](#)

Difficulty Level: Easy

Partially accessible for wheelchair users

This experience invite visitors to explore the craft behind important archaeological discoveries.

GTE SCAN: 75%



★ Supports artisan workshops & heritage conservation



CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



22. WOODCRAFT AND URBAN MEMORY

CRAFT WOOD WITH AYHAN TOMAK & STEP INTO THE STORIES OF İSTANBUL

Hidden in Istanbul's backstreets, this experience reveals the stories behind the city's aged wooden houses and carved details. It begins in Balat, where a guided walk through colourful streets uncovers how wood shaped everyday life and neighborhood identity over time. From there, the focus shifts from observing to doing, inside a small workshop where an well-known local artisan shares tools, techniques, and the rhythm of the craft. Participants carve their own simple piece, embracing the process rather than perfection. The experience closes with time to relax and enjoy a bite in the neighborhood, combining craftsmanship, local atmosphere, and a tangible connection to Istanbul's past.



WHY IT MATTERS

This experience directs income to local artisans and small workshops. It helps preserve traditional woodcraft skills while reducing reliance on mass-produced goods. It also fosters meaningful connections between visitors and local communities, strengthening cultural understanding and continuity.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Hands-on, Creative exploration

Start/end point: Eminönü – Eyüp T5

Difficulty Level: Easy

Partially accessible for wheelchair users

Ideal for cultural explorers and creative travelers seeking authentic local engagement.



GTE SCAN: 77%



★ Supports artisan workshops & living heritage



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CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

23. SACRED WATER & SACRED FOOD

ARCHITECTURE, RITUAL, AND LIVING TRADITION

On Istanbul's Asian side, the day unfolds through water, streets, and everyday rituals in Üsküdar. Around Mihrimah Sultan Mosque, built for a princess, history reveals itself through elegant architecture and nearby fountains that once served the community. A walk through quiet streets passes old wells, water spouts, and details often overlooked. Lunch is taken at a local esnaf lokantası, where dishes are simple, fresh, and rooted in tradition. Small grocers and herbalists add to the sensory experience before the day slows inside a historic hammam, where steam, soap, and stillness bring a sense of pause rarely found in the city.



WHY IT MATTERS

This experience values local traditions, community spaces, and small-scale services. It helps preserve both tangible heritage, such as historic architecture and water systems, and intangible practices like hammam rituals. By engaging visitors in living traditions, it strengthens cultural continuity and promotes respectful use of shared resources and historic infrastructure.

Duration: 6 Hrs

Group Size: 4-12

Availability: Year-round

Type of activity: Water culture, Turkish bath

Start/end point: Beşiktaş Ferry Terminal

Difficulty Level: Easy

Not accessible for wheelchair users

Includes a hammam (Turkish bath) experience.

GTE SCAN: 82%



★ Supports living heritage & heritage conservation



Bosphorus Neighborhoods

Scan or tap the QR code. Discover! Book your experience with Hike'n Sail.



CULTURE & HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE TOURISM?

Recent surveys indicate travelers have a clear preference for sustainable travel, benefiting local communities; but how to find these? Virtually all travel websites make unjustified green claims. This is called **greenwashing**. So, many travelers don't trust these claims anymore. For example, globally, **less than 1% of hotels are "certified for sustainability" by independent private experts**, so this is why travelers cannot find truly sustainable hotels.

How is this in Türkiye?

All hotels in Türkiye must be certified by a national program by law, but many smaller hotels struggle to implement the global sustainability system that is imposed on them, as it was developed for large hotels. So, you can still find unsustainable practices in certified hotels. This further undermines the credibility of certification and of sustainability claims. The editors of this Guide hope that the Turkish government will soon adopt the Good Travel Seal system, like Thailand, Sri Lanka and other countries have done. This Good Travel system shows real performance, published in the **Good Travel Guide** (goodtravel.guide). We are planning to evaluate hotels and restaurants in the next version of this İstanbul Guide.

Flying sustainably?

Unfortunately, offsetting your carbon footprint is fine, but it will not make your flight sustainable. We hope you **will fly less, less far, and make one longer holiday** rather than several short city trips. A good start is to experience İstanbul, then you will no doubt throw your bucket list in the recycling bin 😊

On the next page, you'll find 10 practical tips to help you travel more responsibly and make more informed choices in İstanbul and wherever your journey takes you.

TRAVEL RESPONSIBLY

- 1. Respect Local Cultures and Customs:** Learn about the local culture, traditions, and customs of the destinations you visit. Respect cultural norms, dress codes, and etiquette to show appreciation for the local community.
- 2. Support Local Businesses:** Choose locally-owned accommodations, restaurants, shops, and tour operators to support the local economy. Purchase locally-made souvenirs and products to contribute to the livelihood of local artisans and communities. Consider responsible tour operators like Hike'n Sail Türkiye.
- 3. Reduce Plastic Waste:** Minimize plastic waste by bringing reusable water bottles, shopping bags, utensils, and containers. Refill your water bottle from safe sources instead of buying bottled water.
- 4. Conserve Water and Energy:** Practice water and energy conservation by taking shorter showers and turning off lights and air conditioning when not in use. Please don't change your towels in hotels if your stay is 3 nights or shorter.
- 5. Use Public Transportation and Walk:** Get around by public transportation, bike, or on foot whenever possible. Explore destinations on foot to immerse yourself in local life.
- 6. Minimize Food Waste:** Be mindful of food waste by ordering only what you can eat, sharing meals, and supporting restaurants that prioritize local ingredients. In Türkiye, for example, you can take leftovers to feed stray cats and dogs, something many locals do.
- 7. Respect Wildlife and Natural Habitats:** Observe wildlife from a safe distance and avoid activities that harm animals.
- 8. Dispose of Waste Properly:** Dispose of waste responsibly by using recycling and trash bins when available. Avoid littering and leave places cleaner than you found them.
- 9. Practice Responsible Photography:** Respect the privacy and consent of local people when taking photos. Avoid disturbing wildlife or surroundings.
- 10. Educate Yourself and Others:** Stay informed about responsible travel practices and share your knowledge with others.

By incorporating these practices into your journey, you not only reduce your impact but also become part of a more balanced and respectful way of traveling, benefiting both the destination and your own experience.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This is the inaugural edition of a series of **Good Travel Experience** (GTE) Guides designed to bridge the gap between responsible tourism data and authentic market-ready travel. This Guide includes some of the 120 Good Travel Experiences that have so far been selected by the Good Travel Institute, an offspring of Green Destinations.

The Good Travel Experience initiative was established in **2023** by **Albert Salman** (founder of Green Destinations, the Good Travel Alliance, and the Good Travel Institute), and has since evolved through the active involvement of the Good Travel Institute team and founding **Alliance Partners** such as Riviera Maya Sostenible, Tourism Impact, and others. The Good Travel Institute (GTI) serves as the independent expert pillar of this community, providing the professional verification and training framework that underpins these guides.

Our methodology ensures that all Good Travel Experiences are evaluated by independent tourism experts based on **their positive local impact, cultural authenticity**, and **environmental responsibility**. To uphold the highest standards of credibility, commercial providers of Good Travel Experiences are expected to be either verified or certified, or to be undergoing independent verification or certification by independent auditors.

This İstanbul Experience Guide will be updated every few months, with an ever increasing number of experiences. All are directly bookable with the local provider.

Would you like to see your experience included?
Contact us at: alliance@gti.greendestinations.org.

Your opinion matters!
Click [here](#) to help us improve this guide by sharing your feedback and insights.

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**Where no specific source is indicated, images in this guide are drawn from selected graphic design platforms offering content for use without licensing restrictions. GTE-related images are sourced from the Hike'n Sail website.*

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*This guide will be available in multiple languages.
Visit goodtravel.guide/istanbul to access other language versions and the latest updates.*





FORCE FOR GOOD

The **Good Travel Alliance** is a collective of destinations, tourism boards, tour operators, and travel agents working together to develop experiences with local impact: activities, attractions, events and trails.

We recognize them as **Good Travel Experiences** if they generate local benefits for local people (like jobs and social empowerment), whilst minimizing negative impacts on climate, environment, nature and culture.





CONNECT WITH US

This guide is a living document. You can find all featured experiences on our interactive digital map via the İstanbul page of the Good Travel Guide. We welcome feedback and contributions from visitors who share our passion for responsible travel.

✉Email: teamturkiye@gti.greendestinations.org

Relevant Links:

Good Travel Guide: <https://goodtravel.guide>

Hike'n Sail Türkiye: <https://hikeandsail.com>

Good Travel Institute: <https://gti.greendestinations.org>

Good Travel Alliance: <https://gti.greendestinations.org/alliance>



For more information about this Guide, please check the web version in <https://goodtravel.guide/istanbul>.



IMPORTANT INFORMATION & TRANSPARENCY: The Good Travel Experience (GTE) recognition is a verification of local excellence, community impact, and quality; it is not a formal environmental sustainability certification. The recommendations in this guide are intended to highlight the cultural and local richness of İstanbul. While the 'Good Travel Experiences' have undergone a technical evaluation by the Good Travel Alliance based on quality, local impact, and transparency, the 'Local Favorites' and 'Community Suggestions' are based on local professional insights and resident feedback. The inclusion of any provider in this guide does not constitute a formal endorsement of their environmental or social performance. The Good Travel Alliance (GTA) makes no representation, warranty or guarantee regarding the information provided in this Guide, and accepts no liability for the same.

THE İSTANBUL EXPERIENCE GUIDE

AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES FOR POSITIVE LOCAL IMPACT



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