IDLING IN ISTANBUL

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

Welcome to the City of 100 Names! Straddling two continents, Istanbul is one of the largest urban agglomerations in Europe with a population of 15.5 million. In its thousands of years of history, it has been the capital of great empires—but in 1923, when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk proclaimed independence for the Republic of Turkey, Istanbul lost its title to the more centrally-located Ankara. Its first name was Byzantium (from the name of legendary king Byzas) and after the Romans invaded, it was called Constantinople (“City of Constantine”) after the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great. The name Istanbul is thought to be derived from the medieval Greek expression “Is Tin Poli” meaning “In The City.” The city was officially renamed Istanbul instead of Constantinople in 1930. To ensure people used the Istanbul name in and after 1930, the Turkish post office didn’t deliver the mail addressed to Constantinople. Why did the name Constantinople get the works? Well, that’s nobody’s business, but the Turks!

CULTURE

Separated into two parts by the Bosphorus Strait which connects the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara, Istanbul was built on seven hills to mimic the famous seven hills of Rome. Atop one of the hills along the narrow strait sits Hagia Sophia, an architectural beauty famous for its mosaics made with glass, terracotta, and gold-plated, silver-plated, and colored stone. Hagia Sophia was once a Greek Orthodox church, later a mosque, and then a museum. In July 2020, a Turkish court annulled the 1934 decision to establish the site as a museum and Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared it would be converted back into a mosque. The move faced domestic and international criticism—particularly from UNESCO, which must approve all such changes to World Heritage sites. Erdoğan has stated that the doors of Hagia Sophia would remain “wide open” to all. Explore Hagia Sophia’s halls in this 360° tour, and don’t forget to say Merhaba! to its most famous resident, Gli the cat.
CUISINE
Did you know that Istanbul has a citywide Tulip Festival every spring? Millions of tulips are planted throughout the parks and for a few weeks each spring creating stunning floral displays through which to wander! Now iconic of Holland, tulips originated in Istanbul and were sent from Istanbul to the Netherlands. As you meander the tulip fields across the city’s numerous parks, stop at a food stall to pick up a gözleme or two! Some shops will even have live gözleme production featuring women in traditional dress rolling dough in storefront windows.

COCKTAIL
Keyif, the art of idle relaxation, is welcomed in every cafe, home, and business in Turkey, as Turks love to take a seat with friends and strangers and dine, drink, and chat for hours. Originally developed as an alternative to absinthe, raki is the national drink of Turkey and is made from a variety of fruits, like figs. Raki is typically served with mezze and makes an especially good complement to fish, feta, and cold hors d’oeuvres. When mixed with water, as it is commonly served, the drink turns a milky white, which has resulted in the powerful drink—said to have up to 90% alcohol content—becoming known as lion’s milk, or the milk of the brave. Pick up a bottle of Raki at your favorite liquor store and make a Rakoni, a variation of the classic Negroni!