



## Istanbul Revealed

Byzantine and Ottoman metropolis

**23–30 October 2025 (ML 835)**

8 days

Lecturer: Jeremy Seal

An extraordinarily diverse city: Roman remains; outstanding Byzantine buildings; Ottoman mosques and palaces.

Stay in the heart of the old and welcoming Sultanahmet area.

Explore the well-known highlights and some less familiar ones, with an expert who knows the city intimately.

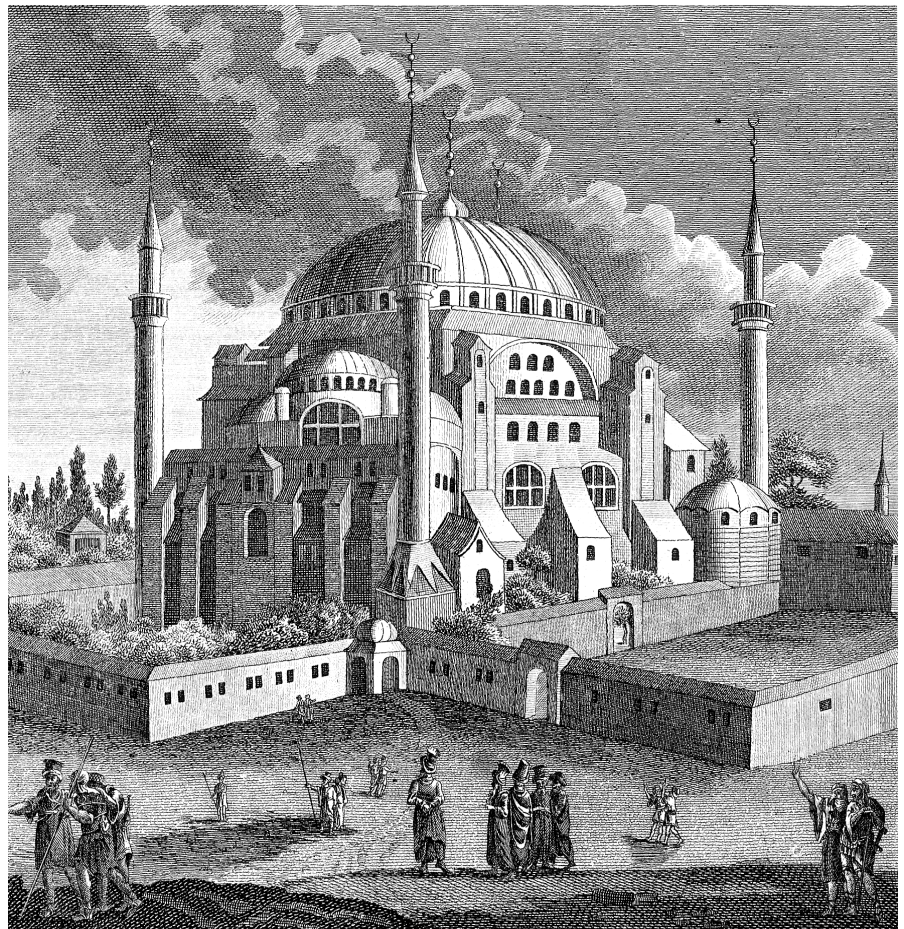
The radical transformations this city has undergone are vividly expressed by its changes of name: Byzantium, Constantinople and Istanbul. The capital successively of the Byzantine and Ottoman empires, and now modern Turkey's booming metropolis, it is one of the most beautiful and fascinating cities in the world. But it is also a place of strange and sometimes subdued moods, a place that was eclipsed for much of the 20th century.

Initially a modest Greek city, it was chosen by Constantine as the site of the new capital of the Roman Empire and inaugurated in AD 330. The Byzantine Empire continued in direct succession to the Roman, and its capital became one of the largest cities in medieval Europe, the guardian of classical culture and a bastion of Orthodox Christianity.

The city walls were the strongest in the western world, and while the Byzantine Empire gradually shrank before the onslaughts of Persians, Arabs and Latin crusaders, it was not finally extinguished until 1453 when Ottoman Turks captured the city.

In the century and a half after the Ottoman conquest, the city steadily acquired some of the finest Islamic architecture in the world, aided by the example of Hagia Sophia, the architect Sinan and the brilliant tile factories at Iznik.

Minarets and mosques now dominate the skyline, but churches, temples, palaces and other pre-Ottoman buildings, whole or fragmentary, and the arts which decorated them, are to be found in abundance. Istanbul has evolved into a melting-pot of cultures, with a lively streetlife and colourful bazaars. The city's international outlook is epitomised by its division between Europe and Asia, now linked by modern bridges crossing the mighty Bosphorus, and a new underwater railway tunnel.



*Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, early 18th-century engraving.*

### Itinerary

**Day 1.** Fly at c. 11.30am (Turkish Airlines) from London Heathrow to Istanbul. Our hotel is in the historic quarter of Sultanahmet. Arrive in time for dinner, and the first of seven nights.

**Day 2.** Begin with a lecture followed by a walk to the magnificent Yerebatan Cistern, recently re-opened after extensive restoration. Continue to the Hippodrome, originally constructed c. AD 200 by Septimius Severus and completely rebuilt on a larger scale by Constantine. Sokullu Mehmet Paşa Camii was designed by the great imperial architect Sinan and completed in the 1570s. The remainder of the day concentrates on Byzantine monuments including the sixth-century Hagia Sophia, the mother church of Orthodox Christianity.

**Day 3.** The Topkapı Palace was the Sultan's residence and the political heart of the Ottoman Empire. Explore the courtyards, gardens, pavilions and famous harem, as well as the contents of the Imperial Treasury, with its collection of sacred Islamic relics (*restoration work is a constant here*). Also in the palace grounds, Hagia Eirene, Church of the Divine Peace. After lunch we take in the magnificent Sülemaniye Camii, the great masterpiece of Sinan. A detour through the Covered Bazaar, trading hub of the Ottomans, takes us to Sinan's exquisite Rüstem Pasha Camii, clad in the finest 16th-century Iznik tilework.

**Day 4.** Travel by private boat along the Bosphorus, the historic and beautiful strait that divides Europe from Asia. Enjoy superb views of Istanbul and the villas and castles of its suburbs. We visit the Sadberk Hanım Museum,

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continued

a private mansion museum with artefacts from across the span of Anatolian civilisation. By boat to the Naval Museum with its impressive collection of imperial caiques.

**Day 5.** In the morning take the ferry up the Golden Horn to Eyup, among the holiest places in Islam and the shrine of the Prophet's standard bearer. The fascinating Zeyrek Mosque is a converted monastery church; and after Hagia Sophia the most impressive Byzantine complex in existence. End at the Grand Bazaar; vast, colourful, chaotic.

**Day 6.** Explore Pera, the district traditionally occupied by Istanbul's Christian and Jewish communities. After a visit to the Pera Museum we walk sections of Istiklal, the city's great thoroughfare, before descending through the Galata district to the waterfront where we take a ferry to Kadikoy on the Asian side. Stop for lunch on Guneslibahce Sokak (Sunny Garden Street) before spending the afternoon discovering this celebrated foodie district.

**Day 7.** The recently renovated Archaeological Museum presents an outstanding collection of ancient art and artefacts, Hellenistic and Roman sculpture. The collections deserve time both for guided and independent study. The afternoon is free.

**Day 8.** Fly from Istanbul at midday, arriving Heathrow c. 2.15pm.

## Lecturer

**Jeremy Seal.** Travel writer and tour leader specialising in Turkey. His award-winning books include *A Fez of the Heart*, *Santa: A Life*, a portrait of the extraordinary posthumous life

of the Byzantine bishop who was to become Santa Claus, and *Meander*, which tells of the solo canoe journey he made down Turkey's eponymous river. His most recent book, *A Coup in Turkey*, was published by Chatto in 2021. He has written about Turkey for a wide range of publications. He also teaches, most notably on creative non-fiction writing for the Institute of Continuing Education in Cambridge.

## Practicalities

**Included:** travel by private coach and boat; accommodation as below; breakfasts, 4 meze lunches and 5 dinners with wine, beer or soft drinks, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and a Turkish guide.

**Accommodation.** **Vogue Hotel Supreme, Istanbul** ([istanbul.voguehotelsupreme.com](http://istanbul.voguehotelsupreme.com)): centrally located in the Sultan Ahmet district, this luxurious five-star hotel is surrounded by the city's important cultural landmarks. The elegant rooms feature air conditioning, modern amenities, and complimentary Wi-Fi. Guests can also enjoy stunning views of the surrounding areas from their rooms.  
*Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

**How strenuous?** You will be on your feet a lot, there is a considerable amount of walking and standing around, and Istanbul is quite hilly. This tour is not suitable for anyone with walking difficulties or difficulties negotiating stairs. Congestion can mean long delays for taxi rides. Average distance by coach per day: 9 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.

**Combining tours:** it is possible to combine *Istanbul Revealed*, 4–11 May 2025 with *Classical Turkey*, 25 April–4 May 2025. We are happy to advise on linking accommodation and transport.