

TURKEY

I made two trips to Turkey in the same year: the first for five days/six nights to Istanbul over New Year's and the second to Istanbul and Cappadocia in early September. Below is the itinerary for the second trip, which I combined with a trip to Corsica, hence why I flew from Nice. There are direct flights between Paris and Istanbul but so far as I know, not between Paris and Kayseri, in Cappadocia.

If you are visiting Istanbul for the first time, one full day (as indicated below) is surely not enough. I'd recommend 5-7 days to take in most of the sights and explore the main neighborhoods. For additional recommendations for Istanbul, from a Turkish friend who currently lives in Istanbul, see the last two pages of this itinerary.

Date	To	Hotel	Comments
Wed, Sept 2	Nice to Istanbul	Side Hotel	<p>Departs 5:15pm, Arrives 9:05pm Turkish Airlines 1816 Nice, France to Istanbul, Turkey</p> <p>Side Hotel Utangac Sokak No: 20 4400 Sultanahmet Telephone: +90 212 458 58 7 info@sidehotel.com http://www.sidehotel.com</p> <p>The Side Hotel is a pleasant hotel in a perfect location: in Sultanamet (the historic center of Istanbul) between the Blue Mosque and the Hagia Sofia. There are numerous hotels in this area, most of which have breakfast rooms or restaurants on the rooftops, with exceptional views of the city. On my first trip to Istanbul, we stayed at an equally pleasant hotel just around the corner:</p> <p>Hotel Armagrandi Spina Utangac Sok. 19 34400 Sultanahmet Istanbul-Turkey t. +90 212 638 1727 / 1737 f. +90 212 638 1742 info@hotelspina.com www.armagrandi.com</p>
Thurs, Sept 3	Day in Istanbul	Side Hotel	<p>On my one full day in Istanbul, I wanted to take a boat ride up the Bosphorus and explore some of the waterfront neighborhoods in the north of the city. You can take a guided tour of the Bosphorus, but we opted to just take a passenger ferry—no commentary, but much cheaper and a more authentic way to see the city.</p> <p><i>My highlights of Istanbul from the two trips:</i> the Harem in Topkapi Palace, Hagia Sofia, the Yerebatan Cistern, the Spice Market, the Grand Bazaar, relaxing at a hammam, a boat trip on the Bosphorus, eating seafood, strolling through Sultanamet at night.</p>

Fri, Sept 4	Istanbul to Cappadoccia (Kayseri)	Walnut House	<p>Istanbul Ataturk Airport - Nevsehir Nevsehir Airport TK0258 04.09.2009 10:00--11:15</p> <p>Walnut House Uzundere sok. No: 6 Göreme/Cappadocia/Turkey Tel: +90 384 271 2235</p> <p>Friday we flew from Istanbul to Kayseri, from which we took a bus to Göreme, a charming small town that makes a great base for exploring Cappadocia. We had to wait a bit for the (free) bus to Kayseri City and then switch to another (cheap but not free) bus to Göreme. Next time I think I'd splurge for a taxi or consider renting a car. There's also an airport (Nevşehir Airport) a bit closer to Göreme but the flight times were not as good for us.</p> <p>The Walnut House is a wonderful little guest house with friendly owners, a nice garden, free breakfast and spacious, nicely decorated rooms. It's in easy walking distance to everything in Göreme.</p> <p>Friday afternoon, after lunch in town, we hiked into the Pigeon Valley for a first view of some of the "fairy chimney" rock formations that make Cappadocia so famous. Wherever you hike in Cappadocia, be sure to take your time and stop in at the various tea houses that crop up along the way when you least expect it.</p>
Sat, Sept 5	Göreme	Walnut House	<p>On Saturday, we spent time in the Goreme Open Air Museum exploring the ancient monasteries and chapels in the rock formations, then we walked back to town on a path that took us through more of the rock formations in the Rose Valley.</p>
Sun, Sept 6	Göreme	Walnut House	<p>Sunday, I woke up at the crack of dawn to take a hot air balloon flight at sunrise. This was definitely a highlight of my trip. Be sure to ask your hotel for recommendations and choose a company with a good safety record. But if you're inclined to go in a hot air balloon, I cannot think of a better place to do it: hovering over the rock formations at sunrise is an experience you will not soon forget. I probably took 100+ photos in one hour!</p>
Mon, Sept 7	Kayseri to Paris	Paris	<p>Turkish Airlines # 261 Kayseri (ASR) to Istanbul Ataturk (IST) Departure (ASR): 9:40 AM EEST Arrival (IST): 11:10 AM EEST</p> <p>Turkish Airlines # 1827 Istanbul Ataturk (IST) to CDG Departure (IST): 1:45 PM EEST Arrival (CDG): 4:25 PM CEST</p> <p>I hate to waste a day flying, but unfortunately there was no good way to get back from Göreme to Paris. Hopefully a low cost airline will start flying direct from Paris to Cappadocia some day soon! At least the layover in Ataturk Airport allowed for some last minute shopping. It's a fantastic airport. Just be careful about buying liquids and watch your watch, as you are required to go through security once to get into the airport and again before you get to your gate.</p>

Additional recommendations for Istanbul, thanks to Kerem!

To Eat (always make reservations, all area codes 212):

- **Bogazici Borsa Restaurant** (inside the Lutfi Kirdar Conference Center near Taksim Sq., ~20 cab ride from Sultanahmet): Hands down the best Turkish food in town and reasonably priced for a nice restaurant. Ph: 232-4201; <http://www.borsarestaurant.com>.
- **Asitane** (restaurant of the Kariye Hotel in Fatih district): 16th century Ottoman cuisine, phenomenal food and will fit the theme perfectly at the end of a day of sightseeing in Sultanahmet. Kariye Camii Sokak No. 18, Edirnekapi. Ph: 635-7997; <http://www.kariyeotel.com/asitane.htm>.
- **Tugra**: Excellent Ottoman cuisine inside the Ciragan Palace Kempinski on the Bosphorus in Besiktas. Ph: 259-0394; http://www.kempinski-istanbul.com/en/bars/index.htm?item_id=41208.
- **Balikci Sabahattin**: Very good seafood restaurant in Sultanahmet. Cankurtaran, Sultanahmet (behind Armada Hotel). Ph: 458-1824.
- **Beyti**: Best meat restaurant in town, and one of the best in the world. Near the airport so a little out of the way but you could do it on the way to or back from the airport. Orman Sokak No: 8, Florya. Ph: 663-2990; <http://www.beyti.com.tr>.
- **Haci Abdullah Restaurant**: 100+ year old restaurant, traditional Turkish cuisine, off Istiklal Street (by Taksim Sq.). No need for a reservation. Sakizagaci Caddesi No: 17. <http://www.haciabdullah.com.tr>.
- **360 Istanbul**: One of the hot spots of Istanbul. Restaurant and bar - good for dinner or just drinks. On top floor of the historic Misir Apartmani building. Was named for its 360 degree views of the city. Istiklal Caddesi, No: 311, Beyoglu (by Taksim Sq.). Ph: 251-1042; <http://360istanbul.com/flash.html>.
- **Bebek Balikcisi**: Good seafood restaurant on the Bosphorus in Bebek district. Ph: 263-3447.
- **Leb-i Derya**: A gorgeous and laid-back bar and restaurant with a breathtaking view. On Kumbaraci Yokusu off Istiklal Caddesi (Beyoglu) with a second location on Istiklal itself. Ph: 293-4989; <http://www.lebiderya.com>.

To Party:

- **Al Jamal**. Address is Taskisla Cad. No:3, Macka Demokrasi Parki ici. Ph: 231-0356 or 292-2425; <http://www.istanbulview.com/al-jamal>. If you make it to Al Jamal, you should grab a drink in the **Nisantasi neighborhood** beforehand -- really cool area with nice cafes and bars, and great for people-watching. Al Jamal is a short walk from there; ask anyone in Nisantasi for directions.
- **Babylon**: Very good live music venue. Take a look at the upcoming performances (and try to buy tickets in advance). Address is Seyhbender Sokak No. 3, Tunel, Beyoglu (near Taksim Sq.). Ph: 292-7368.
- **Otto**: Good music venue with food. Sehbender Sok. No: 5/1, Tunel, Beyoglu (near Taksim Sq.). Ph: 292-7015.

To See:

- **Sultanahmet District** (Imperial Town): Hagia Sofia, Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace, Yerebatan Cistern, Grand (covered) Bazaar, Spice Bazaar, Archaeological Museum.
- **Dolmabahce Palace** (Besiktas district, ~25 minute cab ride from Sultanahmet).
- **Art Museums**: Istanbul Modern (on the Bosphorus between Taksim and Sultanahmet), Pera Museum (near Taksim), Sabanci Museum ("Atli Kosk") (on the Bosphorus north of Taksim).

To Do:

- Stroll along **Istiklal Caddesi** (Beyoglu) (right off Taksim Square). Lots of bookstores, shops, art galleries etc.
- If you want to do **high-end shopping**, you can go to Akmerkez in the Etiler district (<http://www.akmerkez.com.tr>), Kanyon in Levent (<http://www.kanyon.com.tr>) or Istinye Park in Istinye (<http://www.istinyepark.com>).
- Also good is the historical **Tesvikiye/Nisantasi district**, with lots of boutiques, cafes, and some gorgeous buildings. If you make it there, Saray Muhallebicisi (Tesvikiye Cad.) and House Cafe (Tesvikiye Cad.) are good places to grab a bite.
- Brunch on the Bosphorus at Divan Cafe in **Bebek district**. Then walk around Bebek and Ortakoy neighborhoods along the Bosphorus, enjoy the cafes, vendors and the views.
- Take a **ferry tour along the Bosphorus**. The big, white, city-run ferries leave from Eminonu (near Sultanahmet) ferry port in the morning (and then an interim stop at Besiktas), take you along the strait, drop you off in Anadolu Kavagi, where you can eat at a fish restaurant, and pick you back up a few hours later to bring you back to Eminonu (first stop is Besiktas). There are also smaller private ferries ones that take you only half way up the strait but usually have guides on board and take less time.

To Follow (i.e. general advice):

- You should grab a free tourist map at the airport when you arrive. You'll see them around the terminal before you go through passport control. This is a better map than what most hotels will give you.
- Buy The Guide-Istanbul, a bi-monthly magazine in English, and Time Out Istanbul (which has an English version too; also see <http://www.timeout.com/travel/istanbul>).
- Hotel concierges are very helpful; use yours to make restaurant reservations, get cabs, etc.
- Reading Addresses:
 - * Cad. = Cd. = Cadde(si) = Avenue
 - * Sok. = Sk. = Sokak/Sokagi = Street
- Taxis (which are almost always yellow) are very cheap compared to the U.S. You should try using hotel taxi stands for best service. When not at the hotel, you should try to get a cab from a taxi stand (you'll see them all around, bunch off yellow-cabs lined up before a small kiosk). If you hail, it's good to get one that has the name of a taxi stand marked on the side. You should always make sure they turn the meter on.
- Road conditions are generally fine although they do vary greatly with no apparent pattern. Turkish drivers are not known for obeying traffic rules. Drinking & driving occurs a lot, especially in touristy places. You should be careful, but not paranoid.
- You should not buy any antiques or anything that can be mistaken for an antique. Trying to take an antique out of the country is a serious crime. When buying souvenirs, it is best to stick with stuff that are obviously souvenirs.
- Istanbul is a very safe city compared to other big European cities but beware pickpockets and avoid side streets after dark. According to Interpol crime stats, the country is the safest place for tourists in Europe, but you should use the same common sense you would anywhere.
- You shouldn't accept food from strangers. This does not apply if you are offered tea, coffee, etc. in shops, especially in the Grand Bazaar--this is totally fine. When buying stuff in the Grand Bazaar, or at any other tourist store, it's a good idea to look around first and then to bargain (but not start bargaining unless you are really intending to buy the merchandise).
- U.S. Consulate Istanbul: Istinye Mahallesi, Kaplicalar Mevkii No.2. Ph: 212-335-9000.