

## TURKEY'S JUXTAPOSITION: THE ANCIENT AND THE NEW

The mysterious remains of ancient civilizations beckon travelers equally as the lure of modern Istanbul and cashmere pashminas

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**O**ur struggle to get to sleep — even after an 11-hour flight — was our first impression of Istanbul, Turkey. The rap music was so loud and pulsating that we called the hotel's front desk only to be told it was coming from the club across the street not the room next door. Then, at 6 a.m. we were woken by the muezzin calling the faithful to prayers.

And that sums up this wonderful country and why you'll want to stay awake for all of it. It is a delightfully mysterious blend of ancient history, religion and tradition knocking up against the modern world that provides surprising twists and turns with every step. Whether it be the glass skyscrapers next to a centuries-old mosque with decorative minarets from which the calls to prayer are sung, or a fast food franchise selling cheeseburgers next to its Turkish counterpart where shawarma is sliced on a rotating spit in the window, the old and the new complement each other. It's a crazy mix — and somehow, it all makes sense.

For instance, for every two women wearing a burqa or niqab covering all but their eyes and walking behind their husbands, we would see another similarly dressed woman walking beside her husband and holding hands. Mostly we saw Turkish women dressed fashionably, with many wearing coordinating hijabs that took the style up a notch while respecting traditional values.

### Istanbul

Let's first start with Istanbul — a city brimming with food, shopping, cobblestone streets, beautiful buildings,



A large sculpture, "Tensions Trapped in a Moment" by Mustafa Samur, stands on display at the Galata Tower in Istanbul. (Clock Tower Square)



and chaos. Traffic is everywhere and it's every driver and pedestrian out for himself or herself. *Travelgirl tip:* When crossing the street, watch out for motorcycles that seemingly come racing out of nowhere.

Split by the Bosphorus Strait, one side of the city is in Europe, the other in Asia. With a population of more than 15 million, Istanbul is similar to many metropolises with a variety of neighborhoods, each with its own personality and points of interest. It's easy to get scattered so choose what you absolutely want to do and stick to it.

Our hotel was ideally suited, meaning it was about a block away from one of the city's main drags — the İstiklal Caddesi Avenue. Think of it as the Champs-Élysées, Fifth Avenue and Grafton Street all rolled up in one. Specialty boutiques selling artisan perfumes, silk scarves and baglama, a folk instrument that is sort of a mix of a guitar and mandolin, line this almost mile-long street. Add to that a variety of mid-size clothing, shoe, souvenir and jewelry shops, along with restaurants and outdoor vendors, and you'll feel like you are in the midst of a shopping and outdoor festival with every step.

And, the food. Oh my goodness. Small cafes, maybe 10 tables inside and four outside, dot the streets. In some you order off the menu, but most have the menu already prepared and presented in the window. Just point and order.

The street combines two of our favorite things — eating and shopping.