



## My Drift

**Title: Istanbul**

**Written by: Jerry D. Petersen**

**Date: 20 February 2020**

**Article Number: 327-2020-5**

Istanbul is one of the most exotic and interesting cities in the world! I have never been to Istanbul but if I was to visit a Muslim dominated city (99% of Turkey's people today are Muslim), it would be at the top of a short list. I have been to a few Muslim cities (Tangier, Rabat, and Casablanca) while in the Navy stationed at Kenitra Naval Air Base in Morocco, Africa. I enjoyed visiting these cities but found most of the people in Morocco unfriendly and dishonest.



**Istanbul, formerly known as Byzantium and Constantinople, is the most populous city in Turkey and the country's economic, cultural and historic center. Istanbul is a transcontinental city in Eurasia, straddling the Bosphorus strait (which separates Europe and Asia) between the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea. Its commercial and historical center lies on the European side and about a third of its population lives in suburbs on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. With a total population of around 15 million residents in its metropolitan area, Istanbul is one of the world's most populous cities, ranking as the world's fifth-largest city proper and the largest European city.**



**Founded under the name of Byzantium on the Sarayburnu promontory around 660 BC, the city grew in size and influence, becoming one of the most important cities in history. After its reestablishment as Constantinople in 330AD, it served as an imperial capital for almost 16 centuries, during the Roman/Byzantine (330–1204), Latin (1204–1261), Palaiologos Byzantine (1261–1453) and Ottoman (1453–1922) empires. It was instrumental in the advancement of Christianity during Roman and Byzantine times, before the Ottomans conquered the city in 1453 and transformed it into an Islamic stronghold and the seat of the Ottoman Caliphate. Under the name Constantinople it was the Ottoman capital until 1923.**

**The city held the strategic position between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. It was also on the historic Silk Road. Istanbul controlled the rail networks between the Balkans and the Middle East and was the only sea route between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. In 1923, after the Turkish War of Independence, Ankara was chosen as the new Turkish capital, and the city's name was changed to Istanbul. Nevertheless, the city maintained its prominence in geopolitical and cultural affairs.**



The population of the city has increased tenfold since the 1950s, as migrants from across Anatolia have moved in and the city limits have expanded to accommodate them. Arts, music, film, and cultural festivals were established towards the end of the 20th century and continue to be hosted by the city today. Infrastructure improvements have produced a complex transportation network in the city.

Over 12 million foreign visitors come to Istanbul every year making the city the world's fifth most popular tourist destination. The city's biggest attraction is its historic center, partially listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and its cultural and entertainment hub is across the city's natural harbor, the Golden Horn, in the Beyoğlu district. Considered a global city, it hosts the headquarters of many Turkish companies and media outlets and accounts for more than a quarter of the country's gross domestic product. Hoping to capitalize on its revitalization and rapid expansion, Istanbul has bid for the Summer Olympics five times in the last twenty years.

### Top Attractions in Istanbul

#### Hagia Sophia Museum



Hagia Sophia is the former Greek Orthodox Christian patriarchal cathedral, later an Ottoman imperial mosque and now a museum in Istanbul. Built in 537 before the Middle Ages, it was famous in particular for its massive dome. It was the world's largest building and an engineering marvel of its time. It is considered the epitome of Byzantine architecture and is said to have "changed the history of architecture". The Hagia Sophia construction consists of mostly masonry. The structure is composed of brick and mortar joints that are 1.5 times the width of the bricks. The mortar joints are composed of a combination of sand and minute ceramic pieces displaced very evenly throughout the mortar joints. This combination of sand and ceramic pieces could be considered to be the equivalent of modern concrete at the time. From the date of its construction's completion in 537 until 1453, it served as an Eastern Orthodox cathedral and the seat of the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople.

### Blue Mosque



The Blue Mosque, built in the early 17th century, remains an active house of worship today. This means visitors need to time their visits carefully, as the mosque is closed to sightseers during the five daily prayer times for Muslims. All visitors must remove their shoes and women must cover their hair. This is a small price to pay for seeing its priceless treasures that include 20,000 ceramic tiles in various tulip designs and 200 stained glass windows, all with intricate designs. The mosque, built by Sultan Ahmet, takes its name from the blue tiles on the dome and the upper levels of the interior.

### Topkapi Palace



Topkapi Palace is one of the must-see attractions in Istanbul that combines history and stunning scenery in an experience that is not to be rushed. Rich in the history of the Ottoman Empire, the Topkapi Palace is surrounded by 3.1 miles of stone wall with 27 towers. The Palace, which dates back to the 15th century, is situated on a hill overlooking the Sea of Marmara, the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn. At one time it was an official royal residence of the Ottoman Empire sultans and seat of Turkish Government but is now a museum that is considered the largest and oldest palace in the world.



## **Grand Bazaar**



Travelers who love to shop shouldn't miss out on a visit to the Grand Bazaar, with 5,000 shops making it one of the largest indoor marketplaces in the world. Receiving more than a quarter-million visitors a day, the bazaar features such items as jewelry, carpets that may or may not fly, spices, antiques and hand-painted ceramics. The bazaar dates back to 1461 and today is home to two mosques, four fountains, two steam baths, and the Cevahir Bedesten, where the rarest and most valuable items have been found traditionally. Here is where shoppers will find old coins, jewelry with precious gems, inlaid weapons and antique furniture.

## **Dolmabahce Palace**



Luxurious, plush and beautiful are just some of the adjectives used to describe the Dolmabahce Palace, which has been compared to the Palace of Versailles. Built in the 19th century using 14 tons of gold leaf, Turkey's most glamorous palace blends traditional Ottoman architecture with the European styles of Neoclassical, Baroque and Rococo. Home to six sultans from 1856 to 1924, it also is home to the world's largest Bohemian

crystal chandelier, a gift from Queen Victoria. The Dolmabahce Palace's setting is stunning: It was built along the Bosphorus coastline which is also known as the Strait of Istanbul. This narrow, natural strait is an internationally significant waterway located in northwestern Turkey.

### **Galata Tower**



**At 219 feet high, the Galata Tower rules over the Istanbul skyline, offering great views of the old city and its surroundings. The medieval stone tower, known as the Tower of Christ, was the tallest building in Istanbul when it was built in 1348. It still stands tall over Istanbul today. The tower has been modified over the centuries, at one time being used as an observation tower to spot fires. Today, its upper reaches include a café, restaurant and a night club, both reached by elevator in the nine-story building, where one can find the stunning vistas.**

### **Basilica Cistern**



**The Basilica Cistern has been providing Istanbul residents with water since the sixth century when it was ordered built by the Roman Emperor Justinian I. A visit leaves travelers raving about the technology the ancient Romans used to build this architectural wonder that was very advanced for its day. The underground cistern, just a few steps away from the Blue Mosque, was built on the site of a basilica that was constructed in the third century. Known as the Sunken Palace, the cistern can hold up to 2.8 million cubic feet of water.**



## **What are the best areas to experience the nightlife in Istanbul?**

**Istanbul, like any other big city, is one which never sleeps! So much as Istanbul is rich in history, cultural heritage and financial capacity, a glamorous night life complements the city. The night life is so crazy here and you won't be disappointed. Here are some of the best areas to party all night:**

### **Beyoglu**



**From hip rooftop bars and indie clubs to basement jazz cafes and rock bars, and from traditional Turkish folk venues to uber-cool dance clubs, Beyoğlu is Istanbul's good-time heart and soul.**

### **Taksim- Istiklal Avenue**



**Istiklal Avenue between Taksim and Tunel offers the liveliest nightlife in Istanbul as it caters to college students and the younger crowd.**

### **Kadikoy**



**On the Asian side of the Bosphorus, Kadikoy is filled with numerous little bars, pubs, cafes, and restaurants where you can easily spend the night bouncing from one venue to the next.**

### **Ortakoy**



**When the sun sets, Ortakoy transforms into a hip and trendy haven for party goers. It is a true partying by the sea experience!**

## Karakoy



Karakoy is one of the most popular neighborhoods in Istanbul, filled with chic nightclubs, cafes and restaurants. The district has its attraction all day and night long. Don't miss out on the funky street art here if you go during the day!

### Is it Safe to Travel to Turkey in 2020?

The US has revised the travel warning for Turkey by dropping it down to a 2 (mostly safe) with only noteworthy warnings on the Eastern borders. The terrorism incidents that caused travelers to avoid Turkey for several years are now in the past, with no significant events being reported in the past 2 or 3 years (except for warlike events near the border with Syria). Tourism is in a period of recovery now.

The Turkish lira recently suffered a substantial loss of value versus the major currencies of the US dollar, euro, pound sterling and Japanese yen. This makes a visit to Turkey less expensive for travelers who convert those currencies to liras.

Travelers—including Americans—going to Turkey and, **except for single males in Istanbul**, most find a warm welcome, low prices, and all the beauties and advantages that made Turkey the world's sixth most popular tourism destination last year.

### Robbery of Single Male Travelers

Single male travelers are targets for several sorts of scams that end in robbery.

### Let's Have a Drink" Scam

The most popular scam is the "Let's Have a Drink Scam" which results in you paying a drinks bill of hundreds or even thousands of dollars or euros. Robbers love it



because it's easy, and their risk of identification, arrest, trial and punishment is almost non-existent. This is why it happens in many cities and often in Istanbul.

Here's how it works and how to avoid it:

While you wander around on your own in the evening, you're approached by a well-dressed man who addresses you in Turkish. You respond that you don't speak Turkish, and he says "Oh! I thought you were a Turk." Or perhaps he asks you to take his photo with his mobile phone, then offers to do the same for you.

This is an opener to establish his "innocence" — that he is not looking for a tourist to rob. You discover that he speaks English well. He chats with you, then he suggests you have a drink together. He might lead you to a normal, innocent place first in order to gain your confidence, then afterwards go to the scam location. The innocent place may be a restaurant, where he may pay for your dinner, even if you don't want him to—he wants to make you feel obligated to do what he wants.

He will probably want to go to the scam location by car. **(Don't get in the car!)**

At the scam location, as soon as you sit down, women and perhaps other men also sit at your table and order drinks (usually, but not always, "champagne"). Sooner or later the bill will come, you will be expected to pay it, and it will equal or exceed the total amount of money you have with you; or your credit card will be forcibly taken and charged for a huge amount. Typical "bills" presented to victims are between TL1000 and TL10,000. In fact, they will usually take all the money you have or have access to.

If you protest the scam, you may be taken into a backroom "office" and beaten or even threatened with death until you agree to pay. You may also be forcibly taken to an ATM and ordered to take as much money as you can from it.

**Bottomline: You must be careful wherever you travel – even in the United States!**

On second thought, I don't plan on ever going to Turkey.

[Bigdrifter44@gmail.com](mailto:Bigdrifter44@gmail.com)

[Bigdrifter.com](http://Bigdrifter.com)