

The Queen of Cities

Two empires, one city

Every other city has a history. This one has two, and they are still arguing.

4 DAYS • 3 NIGHTS • PRIVATE GROUP, 4 TO 12 GUESTS • SUNDAY TO WEDNESDAY

REFERENCE

TG-QC-ITIN-2027-02

BASE

One hotel, three nights

GROUP SIZE

4 to 12 guests

DEPARTURES

34 dates in 2027

Four days is not enough for Istanbul. Nothing is. But with a small group, a private vehicle and a guide who does not have to shout across forty people, four days is enough to stop seeing a list of monuments and start seeing what this programme is actually about: two empires that built on top of one another for sixteen centuries without either of them quite erasing what came before. Every day below crosses that seam at least once.

Day by day

Day 1

Arrival, and the square after dark

Met in the arrivals hall at **Istanbul Airport** and taken to the hotel by private vehicle. The rest of the afternoon is yours, to sleep or to walk. In the evening, the **welcome dinner** — the one meal the programme gives you — and afterwards a short walk through **Sultanahmet** once the day groups have gone — Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque lit against the dark, and the square almost empty. It is the hour the city keeps for the people who are staying.

OVERNIGHT **İSTANBUL**

Day 2

The imperial core — both of them, on one hill

Hagia Sophia: for nine hundred years the largest church in Christendom, then a mosque, then a museum, and a mosque again — the dome engineers still argue about, and the Byzantine mosaics above. **Hagia Irene**, older than Hagia Sophia and standing a few steps from it inside the palace walls, never converted and never plastered over. **Topkapı Palace and the Imperial Harem:** four centuries of empire were run from these courtyards — the Treasury, the Sacred Relics, and the terrace above the point where the Bosphorus, the Golden Horn and the Sea of Marmara meet, which is the reason the city is where it is. **The Basilica Cistern:** Justinian's underground reservoir, three hundred and thirty-six columns in the dark, two of them standing on Medusa heads nobody can explain. The afternoon closes in the **Grand Bazaar** — sixty covered streets and five hundred years of practice at selling to visitors. Your guide stays with you throughout.

OVERNIGHT **İSTANBUL** · OPTIONAL THIS EVENING: **PRIVATE BOSPHORUS CRUISE**

Day 3

The walls, the Chora and the Golden Horn

Out to **Edirnekapi** and the **Theodosian land walls** — the fortification that held this city for a thousand years and then, on one morning in 1453, did not. Beside them stands the **Chora**, Kariye, whose fourteenth-century mosaics and frescoes are the finest Byzantine painting anywhere in the world and which almost no four-day programme finds room for. Down the hill to **Fener and Balat**, the oldest continuously inhabited quarters of the city: the **Ecumenical Patriarchate** of St George, still the senior see of Orthodox Christianity; the **Bulgarian church of St Stephen**, cast in iron in Vienna, shipped down the Danube and bolted together on this shore; and the painted timber streets between them, where the group stops for **lunch**. Back along the water to **Süleymaniye**, Sinan's mosque and his answer to Hagia Sophia — the architect is buried in the corner of his own garden. Then the **ferry across the Golden Horn**, the crossing the city has made for fifteen hundred years, to **Galata**: the tower, the long walk down **İstiklal**, and the evening ends over **dinner in Beyoğlu**.

OVERNIGHT **İSTANBUL**

Day 4

The Asian shore, Dolmabahçe and departure

Morning on the other continent. **Üsküdar**, and then **Kuzguncuk** — painted timber houses, and a single street where a mosque, a synagogue and two churches have stood side by side for a very long time and still do. Back across the water by **Ortaköy** to **Dolmabahçe Palace**, built when the Ottomans decided to stop looking like an eastern empire: six hundred rooms, four tonnes of chandelier, and the room where Atatürk died with every clock in the building stopped at the hour. A last hour at the **Spice Bazaar**, trading on the same spot since 1664, and then the transfer to the airport, timed to your flight.

DEPARTURE · TRANSFER TIMED TO YOUR FLIGHT

About the hotel. The group stays in one hotel for all three nights, minimum three-star, with breakfast daily. We do not split a group between two hotels. If you would prefer a different category — four-star, five-star, or a particular hotel you already know — tell us and we will price that programme for you instead.

What the price covers

Included

- **Three nights** in one Istanbul hotel, minimum three-star, breakfast daily
- **Welcome dinner** on the first evening
- **All site and museum entrances** — Hagia Sophia, Hagia Irene, Topkapı with the Imperial Harem, the Basilica Cistern, the Chora and Dolmabahçe Palace. **Nothing is paid at a gate.**
- **Private vehicle** throughout, with airport transfers on arrival and departure
- **Licensed professional guide** and **driver** with every departure, whatever the group size, in English or another language on request
- **Golden Horn ferry crossing** on Day 3

Not included

- **All meals other than the welcome dinner** — the group eats together at the places on the programme, but lunches and dinners are paid individually
- International flights and airport taxes
- Visa fees
- Travel and health insurance
- Tips and gratuities
- Personal expenses and shopping

Optional

- **Private Bosphorus cruise** — a boat taken for your group alone, not a scheduled boat. Ottoman palaces, wooden waterfront houses, the fortress Mehmed built to take the city, and Asia on the far bank, timed for the light on the European shore. **USD 50 per person, minimum seven guests.** Below seven the cruise is not run.
- A different hotel category, priced on request
- Additional meals and evening programmes

This programme is a basis, not a limit. Four days is a decision about your time, not about the city. Istanbul does not run out — there are more museums here than a week would cover, a Byzantine layer and an Ottoman one that each deserve a trip of their own, whole quarters we had no room to name, and food that changes from one street to the next. If you want a fifth day, or a sixth; a museum you have been meaning to see, a restaurant someone told you about, a hamam, an evening of music, a day given entirely to the Bosphorus, a church or a synagogue you want to pray in; or if you are travelling with children or with someone who cannot walk far and the days need to be built differently — tell us. This is a private group, which means the programme belongs to you rather than to a coach schedule. We will rebuild the days around what you actually want and price that programme instead.

Why the order of the days can change. Topkapı closes on Tuesdays and Dolmabahçe on Mondays, and the two cannot be moved. Every departure on this calendar is anchored so that neither falls on a closing day, but within the four days the order may be adjusted for weather, for traffic and for the hour the light is right on the water. Nothing is dropped; the sequence is what moves.