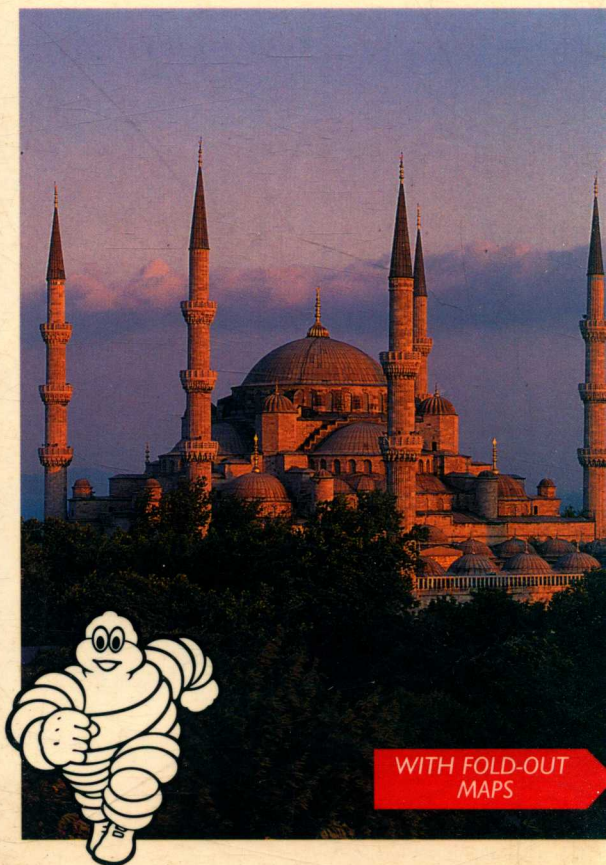


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*Front cover: Blue Mosque at sunset; back cover: ferry boat on the Bosphorus; title page: fish market*

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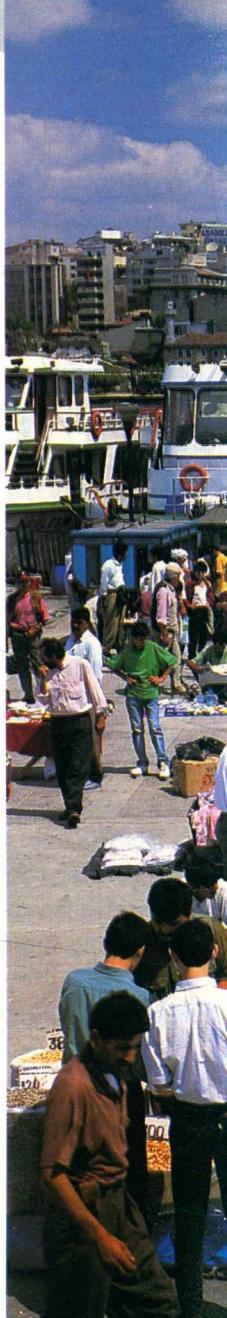


## INTRODUCTION

Byzantium...Constantinople...İstanbul: the Queen of Cities and capital of, it could be said, two of the most enduring empires the world has ever seen, with an event-filled history dating back 26 centuries. The Byzantine and Ottoman empires were not only politically and militarily mighty, they were also highly cultured, and their art and architecture uniquely innovative. With a pedigree such as this, the city today can be thought of as an open-air museum celebrating Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman prowess and extravagance. It remains a city of superlatives. Its protective land walls are the most formidable ever built. The 6C Haghia Sophia (Ayasofya) remained the largest church in Christendom for 700 years. Its surviving late Byzantine mosaics are the most exquisite to be found anywhere. And even its latter-day rugs and chandeliers rank among the largest in the world. Yet İstanbul is much more than just an exceptional collection of buildings and fine furnishings from bygone times. Today, it remains the spiritual and industrial capital of the Republic of Turkey (Ankara is now the political capital). And its swelling population includes a rich blend of ethnic minorities, including Armenians, Greeks, Poles and Jews.

At times it is noisy, overcrowded and polluted. So do not expect staid parks and spotless sidewalks, although these are becoming more frequent. Instead, be adventurous, and let yourself go with the flow. You are sure to be captivated.

*A bustling open-air market, with the Galata Tower in the background.*





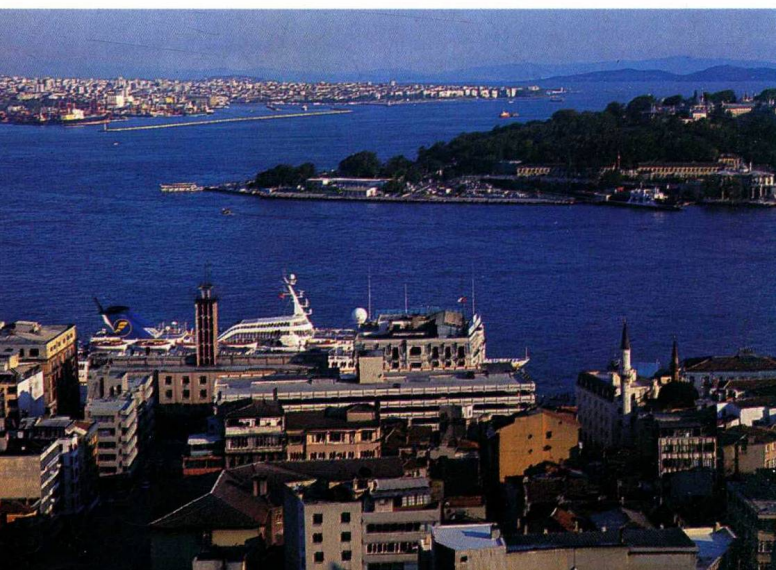


## GEOGRAPHY

The Byzantine chronicler Procopius wrote of Constantinople in the 6C AD, that 'The sea forms a garland about the city.' It is these waters – the Bosphorus, Golden Horn and the Sea of Marmara – which lend to the city so much of its character and charm. Yet it is these same waters that confuse so many first-time visitors, unsure as to whether they are looking at the straits or the Horn or, indeed, whether they are standing in Europe or Asia.

Were any city to have a perfect 'text book' location, İstanbul would have it. The old city sits along a narrow finger of land, circled on three sides by the sea, and with an easily-defended landward exposure to the west. To the north, it is bounded by the Golden Horn, one of the world's finest natural harbours, in which a complete naval fleet could seek shelter. Situated on shipping routes between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, and on land routes between

*View from the Galata Tower looking south-east across the Golden Horn and Topkapı Palace with the Sea of Marmara and Princes' Islands beyond.*





Europe and Asia, the city occupies one of the world's most strategic sites.

To familiarise yourself with the city and its layout, it is worth climbing the 14C Galata Tower (by lift) and taking in the stupendous view from its balcony, some 60m (197ft) high. First locate the **Bosphorus Bridge**, the world's fourth-largest suspension bridge at the time of its completion. This straddles **the Bosphorus**, the incomparably beautiful straits that link the **Black Sea** in the north to the **Sea of Marmara** in the south, and separate Europe from Asia. Everything on the far shore of the straits lies in Asian Turkey (more commonly called Anatolia, representing about 97 per cent of the Turkish land surface). The hill to the right of the suspension bridge is **Büyük Çamlıca** (the Hill with Pines), and with its rash of radio masts, it provides a useful landmark to get your bearings. Further around, but still firmly on Asian soil, are the ancient settlements of **Üsküdar** and **Kadıköy**. It was in the latter that the first wave of Greeks settled, naming their new settlement Chalcedon. Whilst not blessed with the same wealth of monuments as the European half of the city, both Üsküdar and Kadıköy are, nevertheless, of considerable historic interest.

Beyond these settlements, the Bosphorus widens, merging with the Sea of Marmara. In the distance, beyond the mouth of the Bosphorus, lie the **Princes' Islands**, an archipelago of nine islands noted for their fine wooden mansions, and above all, peace and quiet.

Turning to the European side of the city, the **Golden Horn** can be seen, striking off to the right of the Bosphorus, and crossed by a



series of smaller road bridges. Immediately below the tower is the **Galata Bridge**, and beyond this the oldest part of the city, with its magical skyline of minarets, commendably free of tower blocks. The old sector of the city is a finger-like projection of land, surrounded by water on its north, east and south sides. At the extremity of this 'finger' is Saray Burnu, where King Byzas constructed the city's first acropolis 'opposite the land of the blind', and where today stand the pavilions and gardens of the **Topkapı Palace**, for nearly 400 years home to the most powerful sultans of the Ottoman Empire.

To the right of the palace building stands the formidable bulk of **Ayasofya**, Emperor Justinian's legendary Byzantine church, built 1 400 years ago, and which remained for 700 years the largest religious building in Christendom. Nearby is the equally imposing **Blue Mosque**, most popular of the city's imperial Ottoman mosques, with its elegantly proportioned exterior and six slender minarets. Formerly, this general area was the heart of the Byzantine city.

The old city spreads beyond, with its numerous mosques and churches. Though masked by buildings, it boasts seven hills, like Rome, most crowned by fine mosque complexes. The First Hill overlooks the confluence of the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara and is surmounted by the Topkapı Palace. The Seventh Hill lies in the far distance, close to the **Theodosian Land Walls**, perhaps the most unassailable walls ever built, and which mark the boundary of the old city. Looking up the Golden Horn, past the Imperial Docks, it is possible to see the high, arching bridge of the E 5 circular





motorway, which links with the first Bosphorus Bridge. This route more or less runs parallel to the Land Walls. Beyond the motorway bridge lies **Eyüp**, one of the most venerated shrines in the Muslim world, for here lies Prophet Mohammed's loyal standard bearer, Eyüp Ensari.

Note the 'European' architectural style of the district of **Pera**, lying around the base of the tower. As the city became increasingly Westernised during the second half of the 19C, so bankers and business men developed this district, which today bears the name **Beyoğlu**. But the city is still changing: in the distance, looking north, lie the sparkling new office blocks and shopping malls that form İstanbul's current business district, testament to Turkey's current period of rapid industrial growth.

*View south-east from Galata Tower showing the Galata Bridge in the foreground, and Ayasofya on the skyline to the left with the Blue Mosque just to its right. The Mosque of Süleyman the Magnificent is on the far right.*



## HISTORY

Istanbul's superb situation, easily defended and straddling main shipping and land trade routes between east and west, was recognised perhaps as early as the 8C BC. Through the city's long and tumultuous history, Arabs, Avars, Bulgars, Byzantines, Goths, Huns, Lombards, Ottomans, Persians, Romans, Slavs and Turks have all sought to control this strategic position.

### The Birth of Byzantium

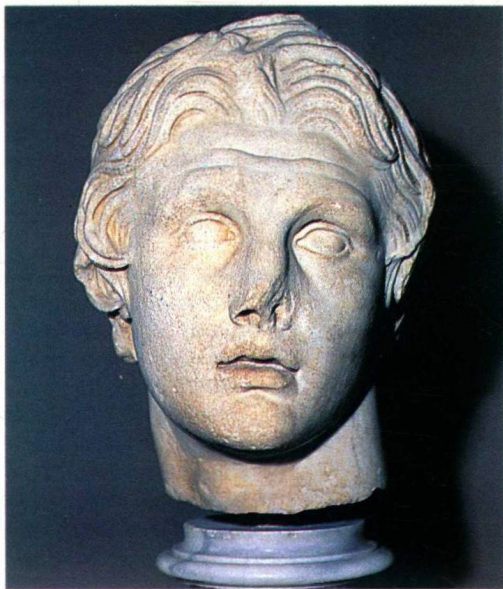
The city was founded around the late 8C to the early 7C BC as a Greek colony by the **Megarians**, seeking to evade continuing assaults by the Dorians on the Greek mainland. The first wave of settlers founded **Chalcedon**, situated on the Asian side of the Bosphorus near modern-day Kadıköy. The second wave – led by Byzas – took the wise precaution of consulting the Delphic oracle before setting out, and were advised to colonise the lands opposite Chalcedon. Byzas chose to settle on the superbly defensible hill of Saray Burnu – where the Topkapı Palace stands today – and founded a settlement which he named after himself, **Byzantium**. He concluded that the earlier settlers of Chalcedon must have been 'blinded' (hence the name 'the Land of the Blind') to have foregone the opportunities offered by his European location.

By this time, Greece had developed important trade links with settlements on the fertile shores of the Black Sea. Byzantium accordingly developed rapidly as a staging post, becoming prosperous from the custom fees levied on merchant shipping passing through the Bosphorus.



*Hittite figures in the Museum of the Ancient Orient.*





*Head of Alexander the Great in the Archaeological Museum.*

Peace reigned for about 150 years, but the city's increasing prosperity attracted unwelcome attention. Byzantium was in turn pawn to the Spartans, and later surrendered without a struggle to **Alexander the Great**. But the death of Alexander saw the start of the gradual decline of Greece as the principal power in the region.

In 133 BC, Byzantium bequeathed all its powers to Rome in exchange for retaining its freedom. As a result, it largely enjoyed peace – under the umbrella of *Pax Romana* – until the closing years of the 2C AD. Peace evaporated when two rival emperors, **Septimius Severus** and **Pescennius Niger**, brought about civil war. The Byzantines sided with the latter, but on his defeat in AD 196 the victorious Septimius Severus put

the city under siege, tearing down the Megarian Walls and burning the city to the ground. In recognition of the city's strategic importance he soon set to rebuilding Byzantium. New walls were erected, enclosing an area approximately twice that of the original settlement. The steady expansion of the city had thus begun.

## New Rome – Constantine's City

In the early years of the 4C, under the **Emperor Diocletian**, the Roman Empire was split into two sections, west and east, each ruled by an emperor, supported by a caesar. Diocletian chose to rule as emperor of the Eastern Empire from his capital at Nicomedia, modern-day İzmit. Following Diocletian's reign, **Licinius** and **Constantine** fought for control of the whole empire. Constantine eventually defeated his rival, and after a brief spell in Rome, ultimately chose Byzantium as the new capital of the Roman Empire. The Emperor himself



*The Valens Aqueduct was part of a complex water-supply network created by the Romans (see p.60).*



marked out the boundary of new defensive walls, and began his programme of transforming Byzantium into the most magnificent of cities. Constantine dedicated his city to the Holy Trinity and the Mother of God. It was to be called 'New Rome', but the name never stuck. Instead, it became known as **Constantinople**, Constantine's city.

### Rise of the Byzantines

The defence of the city was paramount. First sea walls were constructed along the shores of the Sea of Marmara (2C) and along the Golden Horn (from AD 438). Then during the first half of the 5C, the formidable land walls were built by Theodosius II, in an arc stretching for nearly 7km (4.3 miles) from the Golden Horn to the Sea of Marmara thus completing the circle of defence. With the strategic safety of the city resolved, the Byzantines could turn their attentions to other important matters, most notably religion. Constantine had welcomed **Christianity** to the city in the 4C, but Christians remained a minority amongst the city's largely pagan population. It took until the early 6C for Constantinople to become predominately Christian. A series of ecumenical councils were assembled with the aim of establishing a standard orthodox religious doctrine for the Church. This was of considerable importance, for seemingly the city's whole population took a personal interest in addressing these issues; rioting often followed if matters were not resolved satisfactorily. By far the most serious dispute followed Emperor Leo III's declaration against the display and veneration of figurative icons in homes and churches. In 730, he banned their display and ordered

*A mosaic showing two children being led on the back of a camel. This mosaic, now in the Mosaic Museum (see p.45), is from the remains of the Great Palace of the Byzantine emperors and probably dates from around AD 500.*

