

This month, the world's first tube train between two continents opens in Istanbul. Jeremy Seal investigates



Clockwise, from left: market day in Asia; the Bosphorus waterfront; tea in Kadikoy; the Beylerbeyi Palace; cobbles and laundry in old Istanbul; and the new metro

History will be made on October 29, when Istanbul's Marmaray tunnel opens to the public. The world's first intercontinental underground will run beneath the Bosphorus Strait, linking Sirkeci (Europe) with Uskudar (Asia) in just four minutes, for less than £1. The European side is still the best base — it has most of the attractions and hotels — but now you needn't miss out on the treats across the water. Here's our to-do list.

1 FOODIE HEAVEN

Guneslibahce Sokak, in Kadikoy, is Istanbul's culinary epicentre. Stacked fruit and veg stalls, slabs heaped with Black Sea fish and *kuruymis* (dried nuts, fruit and spices) sellers stand cheek by jowl with pavement cafes. Shop for *tulum peyniri* (goat's cheese matured in a goatskin), then grab a table outside one of the adjacent Ciya restaurants, which use peasant recipes from all over Turkey. Try the meatballs with cherries.

2 BRAND-NAME SHOPPING

Ottoman armies once slogged down Bagdat Caddesi (Baghdad Street) towards Iraq's distant capital; the city's fashionistas have something less arduous in mind as they gorge on the upscale shopping along the tree-lined boulevards of Suadiye and Erenkoy. Amid cafes, wedding stores and beauty clinics, there's Louis Vuitton and Burberry. Look out for No 422a, where the leading Turkish store Vakko is housed in a 19th-century villa.

3 THE MOSQUE

Make time for the Sakirin Mosque (Nuhkuyusu Caddesi 2, Selimiye) — the first in Turkey to be designed by a woman. It is a triumph of radical styling, with abundant natural light, a rain-like chandelier hanging from the main dome and a dramatic courtyard fountain. It's set in the grounds of Karacaahmet, one of Turkey's largest cemeteries, so is perfect for escaping the bustle.

4 THE VILLAGE

North of frenetic Kadikoy and Uskudar, a string of pretty villages line the Asian shore, with timbered villas, *fin de siècle* ferry stations, cafes and tree-shaded squares. In Kuzguncuk, with its Armenian and Greek churches, Istanbul's



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former cosmopolitanism still lingers and bohemian cafes abound; Kuzguncuk Balicisi (Perihan Abla Sokak 3; 00 90-216 341 0344) has rickety gingham-covered tables out front, where it serves Bosphorus fish staples such as fried anchovies (£6 with salad).

5 THE BLOWOUT

For waterside dining, nowhere can compete with the newly opened Tapasuma (tapasuma.com; from £50pp with wine). Here's a place for watching the Bosphorus's celebrated traffic — fishing smacks, Ukrainian freighters and fancy launches delivering diners to the

restaurant. Go for meze dishes — the restaurant's speciality — such as courgette blossoms stuffed with seafood, or lamb neck rolled with pistachio and hummus.

6 THE TURKISH BATH

If all the food is beginning to show, or you're suffering from a build-up of city grime, remedy matters at the 16th-century Cinili Hamam (ciniliham.com; from £8pp). Built by the great Ottoman architect Sinan, it has pedigree and elegance. Dissolve in the labyrinth of marble steam rooms, sign up for a massage or an exfoliating scrub, or recline over apple tea in your private cubicle. There are separate sections and opening hours for men and women.

7 CITY NIGHTLIFE

You couldn't be further from pious Uskudar in Kadikoy's Kadife Sokak, known locally as Bar Street, where the city's trendy tribes congregate. Among the tattoo parlours and music stores, you'll find bars for every mood, often with live bands: Bahane Kultur (Kadife Sokak 27/2; 216 345 5449), with its

outside space, is a favourite, while the roof terrace at Lal (Kadife Sokak 19; 216 346 5625) attracts a quieter crowd.

8 THE PALACE

The giltwork, marble fountains, painted pavilions and Baccarat crystal chandeliers on show

at the Beylerbeyi Palace (www.millisaraylar.gov.tr; 9.30am-5pm, closed Mon and Thu; £7) evoke a dynasty intent on going out with a bang. Completed in 1865, it was one of the last palaces built by the Ottomans. Guided group tours in English are available, depending on demand.

9 THE MUSEUM

For a rare glimpse through the high-security portals of Turkish militarism, visit the Florence Nightingale Museum (weekdays, free, by appointment only; fax your passport to 216 310 7929 at least 48 hours beforehand). The world's most closely guarded museum lies deep within the Selimiye barracks, now home to Turkey's First Army, where the Lady with the Lamp revolutionised care standards during the Crimean War. A modest collection of artefacts and letters is on display, though most people come for the endless echoing corridors, the charmingly correct officer escort, the extraordinary security procedures and a final chance to use a fax machine.

10 THE STAY

Like the Asian side so much that you want to stay? For sheer romance, look no further than Sumahan on the Water (216 422 8000, sumahan.com; doubles from £155), a late-Ottoman alcohol factory converted into a stylish hotel with magnificent views over the Bosphorus. The only competition is from the A'jia Hotel (216 413 9300, ajiahotel.com; doubles from £170), a waterside mansion further north up the river.

✪ Jeremy Seal travelled as a guest of Pegasus and the Turkish Tourist Office (gototurkey.co.uk)

TRAVEL BRIEF

Getting there: airlines flying direct to Istanbul include Pegasus, Turkish Airlines, easyJet and British Airways.

Where to stay: on the European side, the family-friendly Marmara Guesthouse (212 638 3638, www.marmaraguesthouse.com) has doubles from £34. For quirky, try the Kybele Hotel (212 511 7766, kybelehotel.com; doubles from £110, B&B). Or splash out at the Four Seasons Sultanahmet (212 402 3000, fourseasons.com/istanbul; doubles from £322).

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THE TOP FIVE MUST-SEES ON THE EUROPEAN SIDE

Hagia Sophia: the 1,500-year-old building, with its domed and frescoed interior, is regarded as the mother church of Eastern Christianity (although it also served as a mosque for centuries). Be there when it opens at 9am to avoid the crowds (www.ayasofyamusesi.gov.tr; Tue-Sun: £8).

Grand Bazaar: James Bond sped across its roof in Skyfall, but there are better ways to savour this maze of 4,000 vaulted shops. As well as the usual tourist tat, you'll find specialists and artisans selling old samovars, antique ceramics, silverware and carpets (Mon-Sat, 9am-7pm).

The Museum of Innocence: this museum, which shares its name with a novel by Istanbul's Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk, is an entrancing evocation of the city (masumiyetmuzesi.org; closed Mon: £8).

Topkapi Palace: Home until the 19th century to the Ottoman sultans, this opulent enclosure of courtyards, gilded chambers and pleasure pavilions brings Turkey's dynastic past to life in all its splendour and, sometimes, squalor (topkapisarayi.gov.tr; closed Tue: £8, harem £5).

Istiklal Caddesi: The great pedestrianised avenue, served by period trams to complement the 19th-century architecture, is awash with boutiques, bars, museums and coffee shops.



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