Istanbul Turkey Port Guide

INCLUDES Sultanahmet Mosque (Blue Mosque), Hagia Sophia, Yerebatan Sarnıcı, Topkapi Palace, Grand Bazaar, Egyptian Spice Market, and Bosphorus River
Toms Istanbul Cruise Port Guide: Turkey

Includes Tram routes from the ship and walking tour maps to Blue Mosque, Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia, Yerebatan Cistern, Topkapi Palace, Grand Bazaar, Egyptian Spice Market, and boat tour departures for the Bosphorus river. Take the tram or a taxi to/from the cruise ship.

From East to West, Istanbul bridges the continents of Europe and Asia across the Bosphorus river. And North to South of the Golden Horn it bridges a modern city with one of the most important historic sites in the world. It’s a mix of culture, phenomenally striking architecture, shopping, food, etc.

Visit the Blue Mosque which rivals the Great Mosque in Mecca. Explore Hagia Sophia, a church turned into a Mosque which is among the greatest houses of worship in Christian and Muslim worlds. Spend time at Topkapi Palace, the power center of the Ottoman Empire for 400 years. Be overwhelmed by the Grand Bazaar which originated as the world trade center for the Ottoman Empire and is very active today. And enjoy the food!

Cruise ships dock 1.2 miles from the Galata Bridge. Popular tourist sites are on the other side of the bridge including the Blue Mosque, Hippodrome, Hagia Sophia, Yerebatan Cistern, Topkapi Palace, Grand Bazaar, Egyptian Spice Market, and boat tour departures for the Bosphorus river.

Istanbul is well-suited for self-guided touring. The T1 tram system runs past the cruise dock to the tourist sites. You’ll need local currency, the Turkish Lira, to buy tokens for the tram. Streets and walkways are generally flat with a few hills and some stairs. A few travelers told me self-guided touring is difficult in a wheelchair.

I caution you that it is always crowded and you may find walking tiring in the hot sun. Your cruise ship may offer a shuttle service between the dock and the tourist sites for $10.

Useful Resources:
- Grand Bazaar Website: [http://www.grandbazaaristanbul.org/Grand_Bazaar_Istanbul.html](http://www.grandbazaaristanbul.org/Grand_Bazaar_Istanbul.html)
- Excellent Website for Specific Travel Information: [http://www.turkeytravelplanner.com/go/index.html](http://www.turkeytravelplanner.com/go/index.html)

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CAVEAT
Information contained herein is believed to be accurate. PLEASE verify the information you use for your travel plans. Opinions expressed are my own. This port guide is protected by copyright law - see the last page of this guide for legal notices.

Tom Sheridan
NOTE: I would like to thank George C. Selfridge, Jr. for his help on this port guide.
Cruise ships line up northeast of Galata Bridge which is the gateway to tourist sites. For an excellent, step-by-step review of the cruise ship dock area, see http://www.turkeytravelplanner.com/go/Istanbul/Transport/yolcu_salonu.html
Salipazari Cruise Ship Dock with Location of Tram Stops, Bus Stops, and ATM's

We've been to Istanbul three times; our ships docked at Salipazari. The only pedestrian entrance to the Salipazari dock is at the security gate entrance at the right in the map above. There is a one-way pedestrian exit through the security fence (shown above) to a parking lot used as a taxi stand.

Dock location is not an issue if you are on a ship's excursion or private tour because you'll be picked up and dropped off next to the terminal with minimal walking. Our cruise ship offered a shuttle service between the dock and tourist sites for $10/person.

You could walk to the tourist sites, but it's 1.2 miles from Salipazari dock to the Galata Bridge. Many tourists use the T1 tram as a convenient, fast, and inexpensive method of self-guided travel.

**NOTE:** you must have Turkish Lira currency to buy tram tokens for 2 Lira/ride (about one US $). To find atm's anywhere in Istanbul, do a Google search for “atm near Istanbul Turkey” and click on the atm map displayed. You'll also find useful info at [http://www.turkeytravelplanner.com/details/Money/ATMs.html](http://www.turkeytravelplanner.com/details/Money/ATMs.html)

All large businesses and major tourist sites accept credit cards and most take euros. Some accept US $. Small shops and some restaurants do not accept credit cards. Check form of payment BEFORE you order food!

**TIP:** Occasionally, an ATM might not dispense cash. We carry a netbook computer to check our credit card and bank statements on-line from the ship. My wife noted an ATM in Italy had charged our account $328 for an ATM that had not dispensed any cash. I sent an email to Capital One re our debit card. They reversed the transaction and eventually agreed that it was a bank error. It takes months to confirm a bank error. If the ATM does not dispense cash, take a photo of the ATM screen display and note the date, time, amount of money. This is helpful to communicate with your bank. It's better to pro-actively find errors on your bank accounts via the ship's internet than deal with incorrect charges already paid by your bank after you get home from vacation.

Istanbul-07-25-2012
Some of the ATM machines are shown as $ on the map above. Do a Google web search for “atm near Istanbul Turkey”; click on the map displayed, move it around and enlarge it to find ATM's.
Sultanahmet Mosque (Blue Mosque)
This mosque was built by Sultan Ahmet I during 1609-1616 in the square named after him. It is the only mosque in Turkey with six minarets. The mosque is 64 x 72 meters; the dome is 43 meters high. Due to its beautiful blue, green and white tilings it has been named the "Blue Mosque" by Europeans.

A striking difference between Christian churches and Mosques is that the Christians use people and their images as paintings and statues inside the church. Muslims use tile and quotations from the Koran in Mosques.

For a 360° Virtual Tour of the Sultanahmet Mosque (Blue Mosque), see
The virtual tour starts with the outside courtyard.
To see the interior of the Blue Mosque, click on “Cami” at the bottom of the screen.
Then click on the 4 outward arrows at the bottom right to see full screen size
Drag the mouse up/down to see the ceiling/floor.

Also see http://www.sacred-destinations.com/turkey/istanbul-blue-mosque

Sultanahmet Mosque (Blue Mosque)

TIP – go to the Mosque early in the morning. Lines will be shorter and it will be easier to get near the front of the roped off area inside to take unobstructed pictures. It is an amazingly beautiful Mosque and should be your top priority site to visit. You have to remove your shoes and carry them in the plastic bag provided.
Hippodrome

The ancient Hippodrome is on the West side of the Blue Mosque. This area was used for chariot races in ancient times. There are three ancient monuments; namely the bronze Serpentine Column, the Column of Constantine, and the Obelisk of Theodosius.

Theodosius Obelisk, is originally an Egyptian piece of art erected in 1547 BC. It was 60 meters tall, but only the upper third survived the shipment from Egypt. It is made from pink granite with pictures and hieroglyphs of the victories of Thutmos III and reliefs of his family.

Today, this square is the center of Istanbul’s historical, cultural, and tourist life.

Hagia Sophia (Ayasofya) Museum

Ayasofya is the largest enclosed space in the world and one of the most important architectural monuments. It's one of Turkey’s most popular attractions, drawn by the spectacle of its size, architecture, mosaics and art.

It was used as a church for 916 years, then a Mosque for 481 years. It became a museum in 1935. The process of converting it to a Mosque involved removal of paintings, frescoes, and statues. But some of the original religious artwork remains. It is a study in contrast of the difference in style between christian and Muslim decoration of places of worship.

The cistern is a short walk from Hagia Sophia to the other side of the tram tracks. It's a cool place to visit, especially on a hot day. The area is over 100,000 square feet with a ceiling height of 30 feet and over 300 marble columns. The views are very interesting; admission cost is around 6 euros. See this website for details [http://www.yerebatan.com/etkinlik.php?id=157](http://www.yerebatan.com/etkinlik.php?id=157). They accept euros, Turkish Lira, and I believe credit cards. The marble columns are beautiful. The "peacock - tears eyes" column is unique (photo above right).

Looking into Medusa's eyes could turn you into stone. Statues of Medusa are on their side or upside down. We enjoyed our visit to the Basilica Cistern and would recommend it. You walk up/down 30 feet of stairs to/from the cistern, but there are handrails and the stairs are normal height and width – not bad.
Topkapi Palace- see this website for details

Topkapi Palace is a large, walled complex of buildings in a strategic location. It overlooks the juncture of the Golden Horn, the Sea of Marmara and the Istanbul strait. It was the political center of the Ottoman Empire from the 15th to 19th century.

Museum displays include the Spoonmaker’s Diamond (fourth largest diamond in the world), the Topkapi Dagger, (a gift from Mahmut I), a vast collection of paintings and miniatures, and the Pavilion of the Holy Mantle (including a footprint, a tooth and hair of the Prophet Mohammed).

There are many buildings because the palace had 5000 residents and twice that number during festivals. There is a separate entrance fee for tours of the Harem apartments for the wives, 474 concubines and children.

Open hours: Daily 09.00 – 17.00, winter closed Tuesday.

Aerial Photo Showing Relationship of Tourist Sites

Note the scale of 2500 feet, about a half mile. The good news is the topography is relatively flat so it is generally easy to walk around the tourist areas. But you are often walking in hot sun and the area is very crowded. There can be 400,000 visitors in the area.

If it's your first visit, I'd recommend visiting the Blue Mosque early, then Hagia Sophia, and Yerebatan Cistern followed by a light lunch at a restaurant along the tram track. You could spend a lot of time at the Grand Bazaar or Topkapi Palace and you might stop at the Spice Bazaar on the way back to the ship.
Grand Bazaar
I recommend viewing the “official” website for the Grand Bazaar
http://www.grandbazaaristanbul.org/Grand_Bazaar_Istanbul.html

The following description and map are from this website:
The Grand Bazaar (Kapalıçarşı) is one of the largest covered markets in the world with 60 streets and 5,000 shops, and attracts between 250,000 and 400,000 visitors daily. It is known for jewelry, hand-painted ceramics, carpets, embroideries, spices and antique shops. Many stalls are grouped by type of goods. The bazaar has been an important trading center since 1461 and its labyrinthine vaults feature two bedestens (domed buildings), the first of which was constructed between 1455 and 1461 by Sultan Mehmed. The complex houses two mosques, four fountains, two hamams, and several cafés and restaurants. In the center is the high domed hall of the Cevahir Bedesten, where the most valuable items and antiques were to be found in the past, and still are today, including furniture, copperware, amber prayer beads, inlaid weapons, icons, mother-of-pearl mirrors, water pipes, watches and clocks, candlesticks, old coins, and silver and gold jewelry set with coral and turquoise.

Gates:
The Grand Bazaar has four main gates situated at the ends of its two major streets which intersect near the southwestern corner of the bazaar

Open Times: Monday to Saturday 9:00 - 19:00. Closed Sundays and bank holidays.

Getting there: Take a tram to Beyazit, Üniversite or Sirkeci. It’s a 15-minute walk from the Blue Mosque.

CAUTION: Be alert for pickpockets and bag slashers (with razors) in the bazaar.
Egyptian Spice Market - see these websites for details
http://fxcuisine.com/default.asp?language=2&Display=77&resolution=high

The spice market, “Mısır Çarşısı”, is the closest tourist site to the cruise ship docks. It is just south of the Galata bridge. The building is L-shaped with multiple entrances. It is the second largest covered market in Istanbul and has been trading spices for centuries. Note the scale of 200 feet on the map at right-below.

There is a large cab stand on the north side of the street from the Eminonu tram stop.
Bosphorus River Cruise
There are boat docks near the Galata bridge for different cruise boats to tour the Bosphorus river. River cruises take 90 minutes to more than 6 hours. We took a 90 minute river cruise which included lunch as part of our ship's excursion. The river boat travels to both sides of the river, close to many attractive sites. It is a relaxing, enjoyable, scenic tour and the included food and wine were good.

Crossing the Bridge to View Istanbul and the Bosphorus from Asia

We took a ship excursion tour that included a drive through the European side of Istanbul. The bus crossed the Bosphorus bridge to Asia and drove up a hill overlooking the river and city. It was a scenic area with great views, but there was a lot of haze, smog, or pollution over Istanbul.

These photos are from the Asian side of Istanbul back to the European side of the city.
Hop-ON Bus Tour

HOHO bus see http://www.city-sightseeing.com/tours/turkey/istanbul.htm#tourlandingposition
Download the Leaflet, Tour map, and Timetable. The tour costs 20 Euros.

Comments by Steve Grech re the HOHO bus:

The closest stop to our ship’s dock was outside the port gates at Karakoy (#18 on the map). There was a ticket seller at the port gate stop, and again at the Blue Mosque stop. The Blue Mosque is the timing/terminal point. They accept credit cards and euros. The bus was clean and fitted with the ‘talking tour’ sets. Earphones are included to receive a running commentary along the route.

We did the full route. Traffic was fine, but it was congested at the Blue Mosque and market area as you would expect. The HOHO bus is convenient transportation and a good way to see the area.

HOHO BUS map (below) shows the Cruise ship docking location
To see this map in more detail, enlarge the magnification of your computer display to 150 to 200%.
For detailed information on use of Trams and other local transportation systems, see

First Impressions of Istanbul

There was a long line of fourth grade school children at Topkapi Palace museum. As we stood in line next to them, a young girl smiled and said “Hello”; I said “Hello”. She reached over, took my hand, and said in perfect English, “What is you name?” I said, “Tom”. She and all her friends giggled and in unison the girls in line said “Hello Tom”. This was a pleasant, memorable experience to meet young children as ambassadors of good will.

My wife and I are very impressed with Istanbul and have enjoyed our three visits there. Turkey would be a great country to spend some vacation time.

Our Experience Buying Turkish Carpets

CAVEAT: I'm NOT a carpet expert and am NOT advising you on what to do nor where to buy carpets. My intent is to describe the experience that worked for us. Caveat Emptor!

Oriental rugs described as from India, Pakistan, Persia, China, etc. are widely available in the US at low prices. Runners and small rugs are a few hundred dollars; 9’x 12’ rugs are sold for less than $ 3000, but “appraised” at $ 9000. Turkish rugs are not generally available in the US and the prized Hereke Turkish rugs are not exported.

Even with your best negotiating skill, Turkish wool carpets in Istanbul are typically two to three times the prices of rugs commonly sold in the US. My guess is that you'll pay $ 500-$1000 for a small rug and $ 6000-$9000 for a room sized wool rug. A small Hereke wool rug was within our budget, but Hereke silk carpets are ridiculously expensive selling for $ 3,000 to half a million dollars per square meter!!

When prices are high and I lack expertise to judge quality and product authenticity, there's a risk of being duped by fraudulent business practices. Our solution was to have Princess Cruise Lines guarantee our purchase. Website blogs often recommend that you avoid cruise line recommended stores because you can get a better
deal elsewhere. What these blogs fail to clarify is the risk/reward. If you are willing to take the risk, you probably will get a better price at a store that is not recommended by the Cruise Line. That's too risky for me.

Here is how the Princess purchase guarantee works:

Purchase at a Princess recommended store. Get a written description of the rug. I also took a photo of it. Ensure documentation and the sales receipt state it was manufactured in Turkey. Stores in Turkey sell carpets from other countries! If you are having it shipped, sign the back of it so you can verify your signature when it arrives. Take a copy of the Princess Quality Assurance Form to the Purser on the ship.

You have 60 days from the time you take delivery of the rug (or it arrives at your home) to file a claim. If there is a problem or question of authenticity, call Princess. Princess will help you resolve the matter. If necessary, they will tell you to get a certified appraisal from an ORRA affiliated appraiser.

We bought two carpets on Princess Cruises to Istanbul in 2008 and 2009. The 12’ x 15’ wool carpet weighed 90 lbs.; I had it shipped without incident. The Hereke wool carpet for the front hall was small enough to carry. We bought both carpets at Istanbul Handicraft Center at Ç. Nuruosmaniye Cadesssi, 32, Istanbul. Their website = http://www.istanbulhandicraftcenter.com/ We are pleased with the carpets and enjoyed the experience.

You can negotiate a much better deal than the first price quoted by the salesman. It takes time and a lot of tea. The best we could get on the large wool carpet was ~ 37% of asking price. We also priced a room size silk carpet in Kusadasi and got the price down to 28% of the asking price, but we did not buy that carpet.

We could not get a good deal on the wool Hereke. The salesman did not even show them to us until we asked and he had to check with the manager to see if they were for sale. Hereke carpets are in limited supply; some merchants keep them as investment grade carpets knowing prices will rise.

**Turkish Lira Currency**

As a general principle assume:

- **ALL businesses will accept Turkish Lira.**
- Turkish Lira is the only way to buy tickets or tokens for trams and buses. You need 2 Turkish Lira for a token to ride the tram (2012 price).
- Small shops and some restaurants do not accept Euros or US dollars. A merchant decides if, and how, he will value your foreign currency (euros or dollars). **Merchants do NOT accept US coins.**
- All large businesses, museums, etc. accept credit cards, euros, and many accept US dollars.
- Ask your tour organizer whether you need Turkish Lira, how much, and where to get it. Our ship’s tours included transportation, admission fees, and lunch. We didn't need any Lira.
- Private tour guides may want to be paid in euros or US dollars. Confirm the method of payment and get that cash before your tour.
- **Because you cannot use Turkish Lira outside of Turkey, get the minimum amount of that currency. Remember that every time you change currency, you LOSE money.**

Turkish law states the E9 Lira is the “only currency in legal circulation acceptable for payment”. Hence, we should assume merchants want Turkish Lira for small purchases and accept credit cards for large purchases.

The currency table below shows 100 Turkish Lira is 55 US dollars or 45 Euro. This data is from the MasterCard website showing the daily, “official” exchange rate. NOTE: There is a slightly different rate if you convert USD to Lira or vice-versa due to BUY vs SELL exchange rates. See the link below


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<th>TRY (Turkish Lira)</th>
<th>AUD (Australian dollar)</th>
<th>CAD (Canadian dollar)</th>
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*Exchange rate on 7/13/2012 – “SELL” Turkish Lira (TRY) to Other Currency*

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Cost of exchanging money depends on exchange rate and additional fees
Currency exchange is complicated. Each merchant, bank, organization, etc. can set their exchange rate. The most favorable rate for consumers is the exchange rate published each day on the internet by large banks and financial organizations. The numbers for this “official” rate are slightly different from different organizations, but the variation is small. I use the MasterCard website rate for my calculations and financial planning.
Transaction fees to exchange money can add 8% or more to your cost.

Finding the most favorable Debit/ATM and Credit Card foreign exchange rates/fees
The goal is to get the “official” exchange rate with NO fees. This website has useful information on Credit and Debit cards in Europe [http://flyerguide.com/wiki/index.php/Credit/Debit/ATM_Cards_and_Foreign_Exchange](http://flyerguide.com/wiki/index.php/Credit/Debit/ATM_Cards_and_Foreign_Exchange)
As you can see on this website, some banks offer Credit and Debit-ATM cards which use the “official” exchange rate with NO fees. The “right” cards save us money on large purchases!!! We use Capital One.

Talk to your bank before you travel
Confirm the terms for use of your credit and debit cards for your account i.e., which exchange rate is used and whether there are additional fees. Check to determine which bank(s) in the countries you are visiting accept your debit card. Not all banks honor all debit cards.
Advise your bank of your travel plans and which cards you are carrying to minimize denial of purchases due to suspected fraudulent use of your cards. Get the toll-free international number to contact your bank if your credit card charges are denied. Some banks provide a secret password to verify it is you on the phone to expedite correction of any problems with your cards.
Some travelers carry an extra credit card as a back-up in the event of denial of purchases or suspension of their main credit card by US banks that incorrectly suspect fraudulent use of the card.
One last point, make sure that you and your spouse have different ACCOUNT NUMBERS on your cards. If you have the same account number and one of your cards is lost to a pickpocket, both cards will be canceled!

Know how to recognize Turkish Currency

Turkish coins are very complicated because there are many versions of coins that have been obsoleted and have no value. It is mind boggling, so I have not addressed it in this port guide.

The only currency bills legally permitted for circulation and acceptable for payment are the E9 bills printed beginning in January 2009. (Photo at left)

Each bill has a number and the word for that number.

- “BES” means “5”
- “ON” means “10”
- “YIRMI” means “20”
- “ELLI” means “50”
- “YUZ” means “100”
- “IKIYUZ” means “200”

Near the word “BES” there are two words “TURK LIRASI”

This is the ONLY type of bill you should accept.
The E8 currency is not permitted for legal circulation and is not acceptable for payment. (Photo at left). It was printed from January 2005 to December 2008. It has value because it can be redeemed at any large bank for E9 currency at face value.

This bill is easy to recognize because it has three words “YENI TURK LIRASI” which mean “new Turkish Lira”. It was new in 2005, but it was obsoleted and replaced by the E9 bill in 2009 (above).

You should not accept this type of bill. If you get some of this currency, you can go to a bank to exchange it if you have time and the bank is open.

The Pre-2005 currency is worthless. (Photo at left). Unscrupulous merchants sometimes give this currency to tourists as change for purchases. This currency is easy to spot because the number always has more than two zeros. Most of the bills have the word “Milyon” which means “million”. This five million Turkish Lira bill was replaced in January 2005 by the E8 bill above.

To view photos of different Turkish Lira, see 
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkish_lira#1st_Emission_Group

Pickpockets & Security
US Dept of State Travel Advisory
In Istanbul, petty street crime is most common in tourist areas such as Taksim Square, Sultanahmet (Blue Mosque area), the Grand Bazaar, and Spice (Egyptian) Bazaar. Carry a copy of your passport and visa with you, leave your U.S. passport in your hotel safe. Carry only what you need when in these areas.

As in other large metropolitan areas throughout the world, common street crimes include pick pocketing, purse snatching, and mugging. Often the crime is preceded by some sort of diversion such as an argument, a fight, or someone bumping you.

Female travelers are urged to exercise caution; request a female attendant in the "mixed" Turkish baths, or hamams. Incidents involving the use of "date rape" drugs have been reported.

Do not buy counterfeit or pirated goods, even if they are widely available.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON SAFETY AND SECURITY, SEE:
US Dept of State Travel Advisory at 
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1046.html#safety

UK Travel Advisory at 
User Feedback Is Welcome

Goal
My guides are designed to help you plan a great cruise vacation by providing information such as where the ship docks, location of tourist sites, public transit, walking tour maps, things to see and do, travel issues unique to the port, etc. Knowledge of ports is important when planning shore excursions because you have to make many decisions and commitments long before your ship docks. I believe the information in this guide is accurate, however you are responsible to verify accuracy of the information that you use to plan your vacation.

Information on cruise ports frequently changes such as bus routes, admission fees to sites, rental car locations, etc. Cruise Critic is the best source for up-to-date, detailed information on travel details for shore excursions, reviews of cruise ships, etc. There are many knowledgeable people on Cruise Critic who are willing to share their expertise and travel experience. I highly recommend www.CruiseCritic.com; it's free to join.

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User feedback helps me make corrections and improve the format and content in my quest to produce the “ultimate” port guides. I welcome offers to collaborate with me or provide materials for use in my guides.

PLEASE Help “spread the word” about my website
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Fortunately, a friend of mine on that ship complained to the purser and the ship stopped violating my copyright.

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Tom Sheridan