

WHERE TO STAY

Whether you feel like staying in an Ottoman palace, taking a room in a restored mansion or traditional wooden house, or even spending a night in a converted prison, you will find the hotel of your choice in Istanbul. Following a recent boom in tourism, the city's hotels and guesthouses now cater for every taste, as well as all budgets. Hotels tend to be clustered around Istanbul's main sightseeing areas. Sultanahmet contains many of the city's historic hotels, guesthouses and



Doorman at Hilton (p190)

new boutique hotels. Beyoğlu, across the Golden Horn, is a good place to look for three- and four-star hotels, including the grand old hotels of the 19th century. The hotels listed on pages 184–91 have been chosen from the best the city can offer across all price ranges. Each hotel is given a brief description and details are provided about the facilities available. Also check the website www.istanbulhotels.com on the Internet. Information on other types of accommodation is on page 183.

CHOOSING A HOTEL

Many hotels in Istanbul are rated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism according to a star system. They range from comfortable but basic one-star hotels to five-star luxury hotels. Other types of accommodation licensed by the Ministry are the converted buildings known as Special Licence hotels. A further category is the accommodation licensed by the Greater Istanbul Municipality. These hotels provide perfectly reasonable facilities, but with less stringent standards.

Accommodation is available in most central areas of the city. The Sultanahmet district is conveniently situated within walking distance of most of the city's major sights. Many of the Special Licence hotels in this area are tucked away on residential side streets. There are guesthouses along Divanyolu Caddesi, the main through road, and on the



The luxurious Four Seasons Hotel, formerly a prison (see p187)



Lounge of the Ceylan Intercontinental Hotel in Taksim (see p189)

slopes leading down to the Sea of Marmara. There are also middle-range hotels in central Sultanahmet.

A short tram ride west from Sultanahmet are the Beyazıt, Laleli and Aksaray districts, which are packed with one-, two- and three-star hotels. The cheaper hotels here are used mostly by Central Asian and Russian traders, while many of the three-star hotels cater for package tour groups.

Beyoğlu and Taksim, the old European centre of Istanbul, are within easy reach of the best sights in the city. Both have innumerable cheap hotels that are comfortable and dependable, as well as international chain hotels.

The Asian side of Istanbul is a mainly residential area but also contains some hotels. There are also hotels in Kadıköy, which are used more by Turks than foreigners and tourists.

LUXURY HOTELS

There has been a rapid growth in the number of luxury hotels in the city, and most international chains are now represented in Istanbul. Almost all five-star hotels boast spectacular Marmara or Bosphorus views, and between them they have some of the best international restaurants in the city. All the major hotels have swimming pools and health clubs. Many of them also have Turkish baths. Conference facilities are provided, and many hotels have extensive entertainment facilities. Most can also arrange tours of Istanbul and nearby places through local companies. All hotels must provide sections or floors where smoking is forbidden. They also provide facilities for disabled visitors, arrange special activities for children (see p182) and have wireless Internet in all rooms.

SPECIAL LICENCE HOTELS

A number of the city's old buildings have been renovated and transformed into hotels. However, due to the nature of the buildings in which they are housed, some of these hotels cannot provide facilities such as lifts. They belong to a separate category, the Special Licence hotel, and are under private management.

The Special Licence hotels constitute some of Istanbul's most interesting and attractive hotels. They are often located in the residential streets of historic areas, and range from small, modestly priced traditional wooden houses to luxury Ottoman mansions. Special Licence hotels, whether large or small, are generally of a high standard. The authentic period decor of many of them gives even the larger ones a cosy atmosphere. A number of Special Licence hotels exist only as a result of the strenuous efforts of the Turkish Touring and Automobile Club (the TTOK, *see p245*). Led by its former crusading director, Çelik Gülersoy, it has successfully preserved the Ottoman

atmosphere of parts of the city by saving old buildings from demolition and restoring them. Its work can be seen particularly in the Special Licence hotels of Soğukçeşme Sokağı (*see p61*).

Increasingly, many of the city's boutique-style hotels are choosing not to apply for official ratings or stars. This does not, however, imply any lack of standards or amenities. In fact, these establishments are contributing to the continually rising standards of accommodation in the city. All have their own websites where you can take a virtual tour, compare prices and facilities, and make a booking.



Latticed window of a Special Licence hotel

CHEAPER HOTELS

Istanbul has plenty of cheap, comfortable accommodation which meets the standards of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. When choosing a cheaper hotel, however, do not base your decision on the façade or lobby, which may look brand new.

One-star hotels provide the most basic facilities, but often have rooms with a private shower and toilet. Two- and three-star hotels have more comfortable rooms and usually a café or bar. Many three-star hotels offer rooms with a TV and mini-bar.

Guesthouses vary in terms of facilities. Most provide bed-linen and towels, and the better ones will have rooms with ensuite bathrooms. All should have communal cooking



Hotel roof terrace overlooking Sultanahmet

facilities. While cheaper hotels usually have central heating they are unlikely to have air conditioning, but an electric fan may be provided. Some small hotels may not provide hot water 24 hours a day.

WHAT TO EXPECT

All hotels listed in this book are comfortable and welcoming. Front desk staff usually speak English, and will be able to give information on sights and travel.

Hotel rooms in Istanbul generally have two single beds, and enough space to add a third one if need be. If you want a double bed you should make this clear when booking or checking in.

Most hotels with three or more storeys will have a lift. There may not be a lift in a Special Licence hotel, however, because of the problems of installing one in an older building. Facilities for wheelchair users are increasingly found in hotels.

Noise can be a problem even in some smart hotels, so in busy areas choose a room that doesn't face on to a main street. If you are not satisfied with your room, you can always ask for another.

Breakfast (*see p194*) is included in the price of the room and typically consists of a generous open buffet, including cold meats, fruits, cereals and yoghurt. Many larger hotels have restaurants that serve à la carte meals. Upmarket hotels have at least one dining room serving evening meals, but some of the smaller, cheaper hotels do not. It is a good idea to check when booking and confirm by email or fax.



Yeşil Ev (*see p187*), a Special Licence hotel



Reception desk at the Istanbul Hilton (see p190)

PRICES AND DISCOUNTS

Hotel prices are quoted in euros and Turkish Lira (TL) and sometimes in US dollars. Prices are per room not per person. All prices usually include breakfast, and tax. Apart from top-class hotels, which have standard prices that do not change throughout the year, tariffs differ according to the season. The busy season, when hotel prices tend to be at their highest, is from April to the end of October. During the brief Christmas and New Year period, the higher summer tariffs are applied. There are no single rooms, but all hotels offer a single room rate of slightly more than half the price of a double room.

It is always worth attempting to bargain with hotels, but do not expect to get a discount. For longer stays of a week or more you may be able to get a reduction. Some hotels also offer discounts for Internet bookings, cash payments, or out-of-season stays. However, do not expect a room with any kind of a view if you have got it at a discount.

BOOKING A ROOM

While you will always be able to find a room of a reasonable standard, it is advisable to book in advance for the best hotels or those of

your choice during the busy season. You can book any hotel listed in this guide directly, by telephone, fax and e-mail. Many hotels also have their own website registration forms. You may be asked to give your credit card details, which will guarantee your reservation. If you cannot find a place in any of the hotels that fall in your preferred price range, try one of the established travel companies based in Istanbul, such as **Gazella Travel Designer, Meptur, Plan Tours** (see p228) or **Vip Tourism**. If you arrive without

having reserved a room, the tourist information offices (see p229) in the airport, Sirkeci Station, Sultanahmet Square or Karaköy International Maritime Terminal will help you find a hotel, but they will not make a reservation for you.



Lounge area of the Empress Zoe (see p185)

CHECKING OUT AND PAYING

Guests are expected to check out by midday, but hotels will usually keep luggage for collection later. All hotels accept the major credit cards, as well as Turkish lira and other currencies. VAT is always included in the room price. It is usual to leave a few dollars, or its equivalent, in the room for the cleaner, and to give a tip to the receptionist to be divided among the staff. Phone calls and mini-bar drinks can add to the size of your bill.

CHILDREN

Children up to six years old are often not charged for rooms, and pay 50% until 12 years old. It is possible to negotiate a discount for older children who share a room with their parents. Most hotels also have cots for babies.

Some hotels arrange special entertainment for children. The Swissôtel (see p190) offers a weekend package.

HOSTELS

For those on a tight budget, Istanbul has a number of inexpensive hostels, mostly in the Sultanahmet area. A popular hostel in Istanbul is the **Sultan Hostel**. This hostel is right in the heart of the Sultanahmet district on Akbıyık Caddesi, close to Hagia Sophia, Topkapı Palace and the Grand Bazaar. The hostel's mission is to provide accommodation that is comfortable, stylish,



Double room in the Special Licence Kariye Hotel (see p189)



Guests at a youth hostel in Istanbul

convenient and affordable, which is great for younger and more independent travellers on a restricted budget. It offers a variety of dormitory rooms with 6, 18 and 26 beds, as well as single, double and triple rooms, which are less crowded. The Sultan is a member of the International Youth Hostel Federation (IYHF) and offers a discount for members. The hostel has a wealth of facilities, including a common room and library, a barbecue area, security lockers, a 24-hour reception, a luggage store and free Internet access. There is also a travel agent who can help guests with travel arrangements and a currency exchange. On the same street, the **Orient Hostel** is a modern youth hostel with excellent facilities, including a rooftop café, a bar and a safe. In the evening, a programme of entertainment, including belly dancing, is offered.

The tour operator Gençtur (see p229) is also affiliated to the IYHF and can provide detailed information on additional hostels in the city.

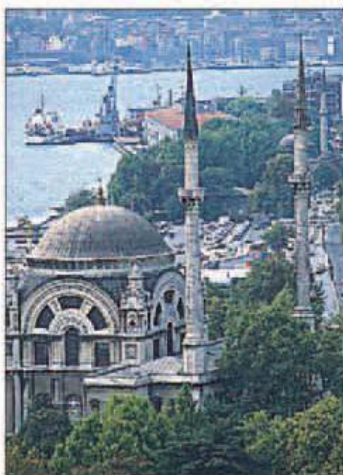
CAMPING

Camping and caravanning in Turkey have steadily gained popularity in recent years. There is an ever-increasing variety of excellent camping places with self-catering facilities open in the summer season, which lasts from May until October. **Londra Kamping** is open throughout the year. It has washing and cooking facilities, a fast-food restaurant, bar, pool table and football pitch. As well as providing camping facilities, it also has two-room bungalows for rent. On the Black Sea

coast but situated to the east of the Bosphorus is another equally attractive and popular camp site, the **Kumbaba Moteli**, which is situated 1.2 miles (2 km) outside the resort of Şile (see p158). This site is open between May and September, and the amenities it has

to offer include hot showers and cooking facilities.

For further details, contact the **Turkish Camping and Caravanning Association**, which is helpful and informative. The association also has a website with comprehensive listings of sites throughout the country.



View over Dolmabahçe Mosque from the Swissôtel (see p190)

SELF-CATERING

Istanbul has a number of apartment hotels located near various central business and residential districts, providing fully furnished apartments for those who prefer more homely surroundings. The **Akmerkez Residence Apart Hotel**, which is mostly used by businessmen, is in the upmarket Akmerkez shopping mall in Etiler (see p211). Its luxuriously decorated flats have air-conditioning and all domestic appliances. The **Entes Apart Hotel** has compact modern apartments.

Global real estate franchises like **Century 21** and **Remax** can assist in finding long- or short-term rental accommodation.

DIRECTORY

TRAVEL AGENTS

Gazella Travel Designer

Cumhuriyet Cad Babil Sok 2, Elemdağ.

Tel (0212) 233 15 98.

www.gazella.com

Meptur

Büyükdere Cad 26, Mecidiyeköy.

Tel (0212) 275 02 50.

www.meptur.com.tr

Vip Tourism

Tel (0212) 241 65 14.

www.viptourism.com.tr

YOUTH HOSTELS

Orient Hostel

Akbıyık Cad 13, Sultanahmet.

Map 3 E5 (5 E5).

Tel (0212) 517 94 93.

www.orienthostel.com

Sultan Hostel

Akbıyık Cad 21, Sultanahmet.

Map 3 E5 (5 E5).

Tel (0212) 516 92 60.

www.sultanhostel.com

CAMPING

Kumbaba Moteli

Şile. **Tel** (0216) 711 50 38.

Fax (0216) 711 48 51.

Londra Kamping

Londra Asfaltı, Bakırköy.

Tel (0212) 560 42 00.

Fax (0212) 559 34 38.

Turkish Camping and Caravanning Association

Feliz Sok, 52 Kartaltepe Mah, Bakırköy.

Tel (0212) 662 46 15.

www.kampkaravan.org

SELF-CATERING

Akmerkez Residence

Akmerkez Shopping & Business Centre, Etiler.

Tel (0212) 282 01 20.

www.akmerkez.com.tr

Century 21

Topçular Kışla Cad 5, Rami-Eyüp.

Tel (0212) 493 26 00.

www.century21.com.tr

Entes Apart Hotel

İpek Sok 19, Taksim. **Map** 7 E4.

Tel (0212) 293 22 08.

www.entesapart.com

Remax

Tel (0212) 232 48 20.

www.remax.com.tr