

ISTANBUL THROUGH THE YEAR

Istanbul is at its best in late May and early September, when temperatures are mild and sunshine is plentiful. High season, from June to August, is the most expensive, crowded and hottest time to visit, but the summer arts and music festivals are highlights in the city's cultural calendar. Late November until March or April can be damp and dreary. However, Istanbul is still mild



National Sovereignty Day in Istanbul

and winter and, with fewer tour parties around, you can enjoy the sights in peace. As well as arts and sporting events, several public holidays and religious festivals punctuate the year. It is wise to be aware of these when planning an itinerary as some sights may be closed or else crammed with locals enjoying a day out. Some of these celebrations are also fascinating spectacles in their own right.



Tulips growing in Emirgan Park, scene of the spring Tulip Festival

SPRING

As the winter smog fades and sunshine increases, cafés and restaurants prepare for the first wave of alfresco dining. After a winter's diet of apples and oranges, a welcome crop of spring fruits, including fresh figs, strawberries and tart green plums, arrives in the shops. Toasted sweetcorn is sold from carts (see p208), and a spring catch of sea bream, sea bass and turbot is on the menu. Tulips, hyacinths, daffodils and pansies fill parks and gardens, and the distinctive pink buds of the Judas tree are seen along the Bosphorus. Monuments and museums are generally uncrowded in spring, and discounts are available at many hotels. In May the popular son et lumière shows outside the Blue Mosque (see pp78–9) begin and continue until September.

EVENTS

Easter (March or April).

Pilgrimage to the Monastery of St George on Büyükada in the Princes' Islands (see p159).

International Istanbul Film Festival (late March–mid-April), selected cinemas.

Screening of Turkish and foreign films and related events.

Tulip Festival (April), Emirgan Park (see p141). Displays of springtime blooms.

National Sovereignty Day (23 April). Public holiday marking the inauguration of the Turkish Republic in 1923 (see pp30–31). Children take to the streets in folk costume.

Commemoration of the Anzac Landings (25 April), Gallipoli. Britons, Australians and New Zealanders gather at the location of the Anzac landings at Gallipoli during World War I (see pp170–71).

Spring Day and Workers' Day (1 May).

Unofficial public holiday when workers usually attend union-organized rallies.

Kakava Festival (early May), Edirne. A celebration of gypsy music and dance.

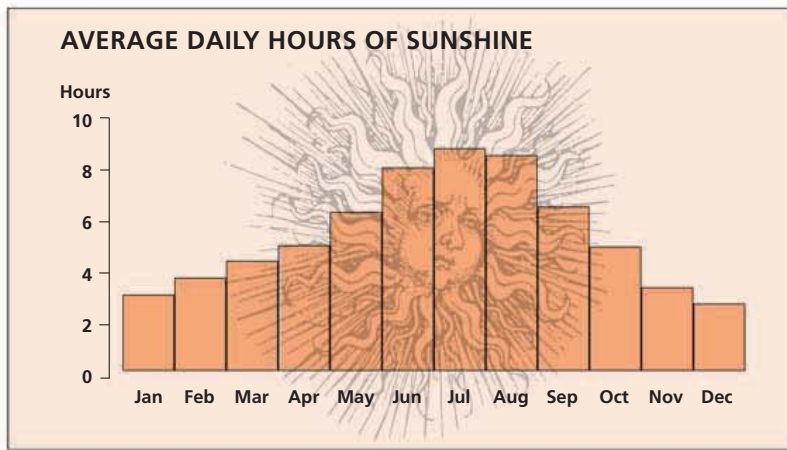
Youth and Sports Day (19 May). Public holiday in commemoration of the start of the War of Independence (see p31) in 1919, with sporting events and other activities held throughout the city in stadiums and on the streets.

International Istanbul Theatre Festival (May–June, every two years), various venues. European and Turkish productions.

Conquest of Istanbul (29 May), between Tophane and Karaköy and on the shores of the upper Bosphorus. Mehmet the Conqueror's taking of the city in 1453 (see p26) is re-enacted in street parades and mock battles.



Colourful evening son et lumière show at the Blue Mosque



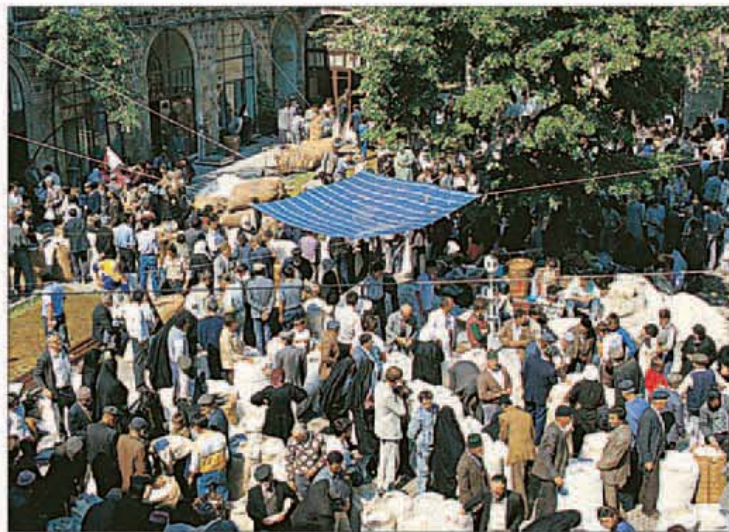
Sunshine Chart
 One of Istanbul's attractions is its summer sunshine – there are about 2,500 hours each year. From May to October the city is bathed in light well into the evening, however, bursts of heavy rain are common in high summer. Winter, by contrast, is notoriously deprived of sun.

SUMMER

In contrast to an all-too-brief spring, the warm weather and clear skies of summer can linger on in Istanbul until November. In July and August temperatures soar and although luxury hotels have air conditioning, cheaper ones do not. Popular sights are packed with tourists throughout the high season. Picturesque locations outside Istanbul may, on the other hand, be overrun by locals. At weekends city dwellers trek out to the Belgrade Forest and Black Sea beaches (see p158) or to health clubs along the Bosphorus. Those who can afford it flee to their coastal summer homes until autumn.

For those who stay behind there is a strong summer culture. This includes a wild nightlife in hundreds of bars and night spots (see p213), and enthusiastic support for many arts festivals, which attract world-famous performers. Look out, too, for events taking place in historical buildings. You may be able to listen to classical music in Hagia Eirene (see p60) or enjoy a pop concert in the Fortress of Europe on the Bosphorus (see pp140–41). This is also the best time of year for outdoor sports such as hiking, horse-riding, water sports, golf and parachuting.

In summer, the menu focuses more on meat than fish, but vegetables and fresh fruit – such



Silk Market in Bursa, which operates all year round

as honeydew melons, cherries, mulberries, peaches and apricots – are widely available. In July and August many shops have summer sales (see p203).

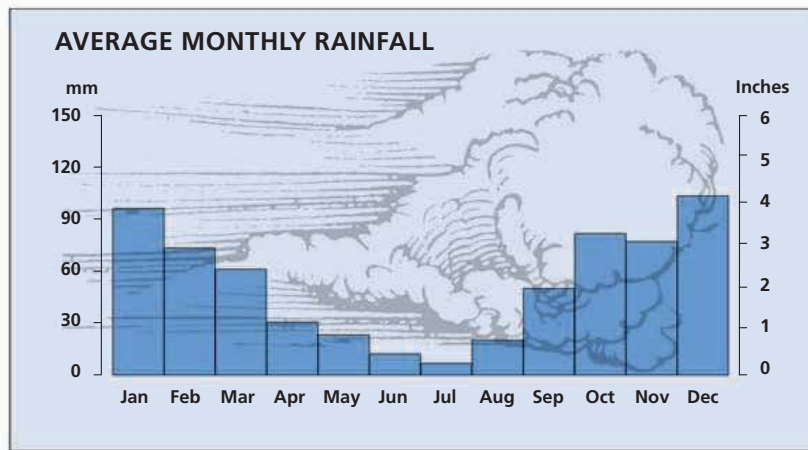
EVENTS

Silk Market (June–July), Bursa. Special market for the sale of silk cocoons (see p164).
International Istanbul Music and Dance Festival (mid-June–July). Classical music, opera and dance performed in historic locations. Mozart's *Abduction from the*



Performance of Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* in the Harem of Topkapı Palace

Seraglio is staged annually in Topkapı Palace (see pp54–9).
Bursa Festival (June–July), Bursa Park. Music, folk dancing, plays, opera and shadow puppetry.
Navy Day (1 July). Parades of old and new boats along the Bosphorus.
International Istanbul Jazz Festival (July), various venues. International event with a devoted following.
International Sailing Races (July). Regatta held at the Marmara Islands (see p169).
Grease Wrestling (July), Kırkpınar, Edirne. Wrestlers smeared in olive oil grapple with each other (see p154).
Hunting Festival (3 days, late July), Edirne. Music, art and fishing displays.
Folklore and Music Festival (late July), Bursa. Ethnic dances and crafts displays.
Festival of Troy (August), Çanakkale. Re-enactment of the tale of Troy (see p171).
Victory Day (30 August). Public holiday commemorating victory over Greece in 1922.



Rainfall Chart

Winter is the wettest season in Istanbul. Heavy showers of rain can sometimes continue into April and May, making spring seem shorter. Sudden snowstorms are not uncommon in winter, but these are short-lived and snowfalls will usually melt away as quickly as they come.

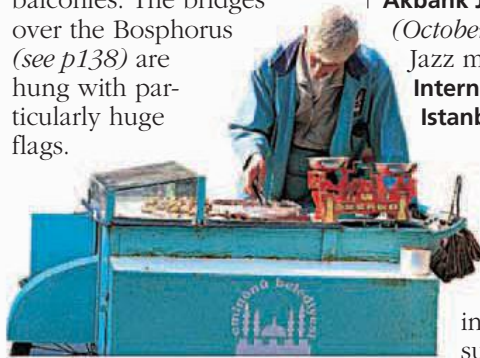
AUTUMN

Residents of Istanbul often consider their city to be at its best in autumn. As the summer heat loses its grip, chestnut sellers appear on the streets (see p208), pumpkins are sold in the markets, and fresh figs are eaten in abundance. In the surrounding countryside, cotton, wheat and sunflowers are harvested. Migratory grouper and bonito are among the tastiest types of fish which are caught at this time of year.

A popular beauty spot for its array of autumn colours is Lake Abant, 200 km (125 miles) east of Istanbul. Meanwhile, bird-watchers converge on the hills overlooking the Bosphorus to view great flocks of migratory birds heading for their warm wintering grounds in Africa (see p141).

On the cultural agenda is a world-class arts biennial and an antiques fair which blends

Turkish and Western aesthetics. Several public holidays reaffirm Turkey's commitment to secularism, including Republic Day in late October, during which flags are hung from balconies. The bridges over the Bosphorus (see p138) are hung with particularly huge flags.



Street-side roasting of seasonal chestnuts

EVENTS

Tüyap Arts Fair (September), opposite the Pera Palas Hotel (see p104). A showcase of Istanbul's artistic talent.

Yapı Kredi Festival (September), various venues. A celebration of music and dance promoting young performers.

Republic Day (29 October).

Public holiday commemorating Atatürk's proclamation of the Republic in 1923 (see p31). The Turkish flag adorns buildings in the city.

Akbank Jazz Festival

(October), various venues.

Jazz music (see p221).

International

Istanbul Fine Arts Biennial

(October–November every two years, 2011, 2013).

International and local avant-garde artists exhibit work in historic locations such as Haghia Eirene and the Imperial Mint

(see p60), and the Basilica Cistern (see p76).

Anniversary of Death (10 November). A minute's silence is observed at 9:05am, the precise time of Atatürk's death in Dolmabahçe Palace (see pp128–9) in 1938.

Tüyap Book Fair (October), Belikduzu Fair and Congress Centre. Istanbul's premier publishing event showcases prominent writers.

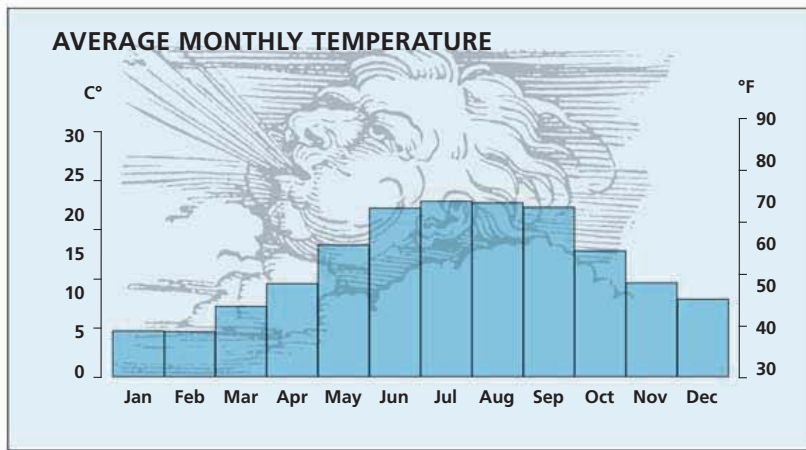
Efes Pilsen Blues Festival (early November), selected venues. Foreign and local blues bands play in popular music venues across the city.

Interior Design Fair (first week of November), Çırağan Palace Hotel Kempinski (see p123). Interior designers and antique dealers display up-market wares in this popular annual show.

Elit's Kûsav Antiques Fair (mid-November), Military Museum (see p126). Sale of local and foreign paintings, furniture, carpets, maps, books, porcelain, textiles, silver, clocks and bronze statuary.



Crowds gathering to celebrate Republic Day on 29 October



Temperature Chart
 The temperature of the city rarely drops below freezing in winter, and even very cold snaps seldom last longer than three days. The heat of the long, humid summer is intensified by the lodos wind, which blows in from the Sea of Marmara. However, the northerly poyraz occasionally provides a cooling breeze.

WINTER

There are distinct bonuses to visiting Istanbul in the winter, when even major sights are uncrowded, although the rain, fog and pollution may be off-putting. Shops in the Akmerkez, Galleria, Capitol and Carousel malls (see p211) hold sales, making the city a shopper's paradise for leather, woollens and fashion.

Outside Istanbul, when enough snow has fallen on the mountains, the ski season begins in Uludağ (see p169), one of Turkey's most important winter sports resorts. Meanwhile baklava and cream cakes are consumed in the cosy cafés along the Bosphorus and in the old quarter of Beyoğlu (see pp100-7).



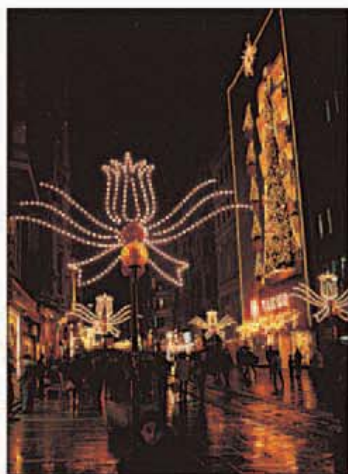
View of Bebek on the Bosphorus (see pp136-49) in winter

the founder of the famous Whirling Dervishes.

Christmas (late December). Though Christmas Day is not a public holiday, major hotels organize seasonal festivities.
New Year's Day (1 January). Public holiday incorporating European Christmas traditions

including eating turkey, decorating trees and partying. Strings of lights adorn the main roads.

Karadam Ski Festival (second half of February), Uludağ Mountain. Competitions organized by local radio stations and the Uludağ Ski Instructors' Association.



Multitude of lights to welcome in the New Year in Beyoğlu

EVENTS

Mevlâna Festival (17-24 December), Mevlevi Monastery (see p104). Enthusiastic Istanbul devotees perform special dances in honour of

MUSLIM HOLIDAYS

The dates of Muslim holidays vary according to the phases of the moon and therefore change from year to year. In the holy month of **Ramazan**, Muslims refrain from eating and drinking between dawn and dusk. Some restaurants are closed during the day, and tourists should be discreet when eating in public. Straight after this is the three-day **Şeker Bayramı** (Sugar Festival), when sweetmeats are prepared. Two months later the four-day **Kurban Bayramı** (Feast of the Sacrifice) commemorates the Koranic version of Abraham's sacrifice. This is the main annual public holiday in Turkey, and hotels, trains and roads are packed. Strict Muslims also observe the festivals of **Regaip Kandili**, **Miraç Kandili**, **Berat Kandili** and **Mevlid-i-Nebi**.



Festivities during Şeker Bayramı